WHISTLING JIMPS

EDNA TURPIN

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WHISTLING JIMPS

Jimps fell down the cliff

WHISTLING JIMPS

BY
EDNA TURPIN
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Abram's Freedom," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY
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NEW YORK
THE CENTURY CO.
1922

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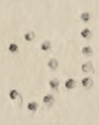

$1.75

PRINTED IN U. S. A.

SEP -7 1922
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To

ALIDA WILSON

NANCY TUCKER WILSON

ELSIE BOYD TUCKER

BETSY COKE

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CHAPTER I

"YOU boy! Look out!" Mrs. Harvie called warningly.

Page Ruffin, curled up with a book in the hammock, glanced around and saw a ragged youngster at the upper end of the camp-ground. Without the slightest attention to Mrs. Harvie, he kept on his way.

"Look out! Stop there!" she called again. "He 's awfully cross, really vicious; he 'll not make friends with any one."

The boy did not answer, even by a look. Nor did he pause. He went close to the parrot's cage, although the bird, regarding all humankind as its foes, was seconding its mistress's warning; it ruffled its feathers, flapped its wings, squawked harshly, and made futile, furious pecks at the firm bars of its prison.

"Well, if you will—" Mrs. Harvie gave

the hard-headed fellow up to his punishment.

For a minute or two the boy stood perfectly still, staring at the strange, gorgeous bird. Then he gave a sweet, coaxing call. The parrot perked its head sideways and listened. It uttered a short cry that was less fierce, but still belligerent; it could not forget the bars between it and the gay summer world.

The boy repeated the call. It began with a low, clear whistle, and rippled and gurgled into a liquid note that melted into the stillness as if it were a part of it. It was a quite indescribable sound, as if a bird's song had blended with, had changed into, the plashing of a stream, the rustle of summer sunlit woods—all the freshness and fragrance and color of outdoors.

Page caught herself with perked-up lips trying to echo the whistle. And the bird fixed its bright beadlike eyes on the boy's face, slowly dropped its wings and smoothed its angry plumage, then gave a sharp but friendly whistle in reply. The boy laughed and thrust a sunburnt hand between the bars of the cage. And the parrot, crossest and most vicious of

all its race, laid its head against the hand and gave a soft, friendly little note.

"O Mrs. Harvie! Isn't that wonderful?" cried Page, dropping her book and jumping out of the hammock. "That 's the first person Zillo has not fought—claw, beak, and voice. —What did you do to him?"

The boy did not answer. Page looked at his intent face, and laughed.

"You look like I feel when I 'm reading a book I love," she said. She put her hand on his shoulder. "What on earth did you do to Zillo?" she demanded. "I want to know, for he 's nipped my fingers a dozen times, and me trying to feed him and be friends! What did you do?"

"Nothin'." The boy's voice was slow and sweet. He had a trick of screwing up his flexible lips before and after he spoke that made it seem as if his native speech were a whistle from which he turned with effort to the language of humans. "I nuver see a bird like him. Thar ain't none sich in the woods hereabouts."

"It 's a parrot. It came from South Amer-

ica. Mrs. Harvie's brother sent it to her," Page informed him, smiling as she looked at him.

There was a quaint charm about the boy. He was a barefooted, ragged, dirty little fellow of about thirteen, with a wild, friendly, sun-browned face. The tip of his nose had a comical uptilt, and his eyebrows ran up in peaks over his eyes, which were deep-set and had long, dark lashes. When he looked up at the parrot, Page saw that his eyes were a clear light gray and as bright and quick as the bird's.

"Come on, Jimps!" a voice called sharply. "Don't stand thar bewitchted with that bird. Mammy say for us to go to the hotel an' sell them minnows an' come home."

Page, looking in the direction of the voice, saw a group of young mountaineers. They had just come up the path from the chestnut woods into the main road. They were all barefooted, ragged, and dirty, and all of them had bright, wild, dark faces. In front was a girl of about fifteen, carrying her baby brother on her hip. At her heels trudged a ten-year-old girl, bearing with grave caution a bucket

"What did you do to Zillo?" she demanded

of minnows. There were two younger children, a girl and a boy, with bunches of wild flowers clutched in their fists.

"Come on, Jimps!" the eldest girl repeated impatiently. "Don't keep us waitin'."

"You go on, Minta. Leave me be." The boy flung his answer to his sister without moving or looking toward her.

"I ain't. I ain't goin' to stir a step without you go," she declared. "You jest lief stay thar till dark, gazin' at that bird. You come on, Jimps."

While Minta was arguing with her loitering brother, the smaller children scattered about the camp-ground like so many roaming puppies.

"O Mrs. Harvie!" cried Page. "That little girl is eating an apple-paring. May n't I give them some apples?"

"Give them bread and meat, too," answered Mrs. Harvie. "And there are some honey-cakes in the tin box."

Page dispensed a bountiful supply of food to the young mountaineers, who sat down on the ground and ate greedily—all except the boy

called Jimps. He stood beside the parrot's cage, munching the sandwich that Page thrust into his hand, and giving the bird bits of bread and apple, which it accepted with friendly little chirps.

Page went back to her book and to the hammock under a great chestnut-tree beside the camp-ground—"Starwink Camp" it was called by the young folk who had camped there every summer for several years.

No lovelier site could be found than the grassy, tree-encircled glade at the lower end of Hilltop Lake, which is set like a jewel in the crest of the Virginia Alleghanies. And Starwink Camp never looked more beautiful than it did on that late August afternoon, with the sunlight gilding the glade and lying in streaks and patches in the surrounding woodland.

All the young people except Page Ruffin—Mary Watkins, Elinor Lane, Anne Lewis, Harrison Ruffin, and three Harvie boys, Christopher and David and Alexander—had gone rowing on the lake. Page had stayed at camp with a book she was eager to finish. She

snuggled down now in the hammock where sunbeams, flickering through the chestnut foliage, found her out and danced over the brown face, kissed the rose-red lips, brightened the fair hair into spun gold, and twinkled in the gray-blue eyes under the dark lashes. She read on, and the chirping and whistling of the boy and the parrot made themselves a part of the harmony of the summer day.

But there came an alien note. A woman's high-pitched voice called: "Good afternoon, Mrs. Harvie! Oh! What have you in that great basket?"

The speaker was Mrs. Candler, a vivid, vivacious little woman who was staying at the hotel at the upper end of the lake. She came strolling down the road, with her small son Reginald hanging to her hand. His pert young voice followed his mother's shrill tones.

"Say! what you got in that basket?" he demanded.

"Mushrooms," replied Mrs. Harvie; "chantarelles and russulas and some violet cortinarius; beauties they are, and they 'll make a delicious dish."

"Mushrooms! Where did you get them?" asked Mrs. Candler.

"Back there." Mrs. Harvie nodded toward the woods. "There are quantities around here. We gather some nearly every day."

"And you eat them?" asked Mrs. Candler, with a little shudder. "Why, I would n't dare eat mushrooms except out of a market-basket or a can."

"Some one has to gather them to put into baskets and cans, you know," said Mrs. Harvie, laughing. "I 'd as soon trust my hands and eyes and wits as the market-gardener's. We gather only a few varieties, ones we are perfectly sure are good. Look at the lovely cobweb veil of this cortinarius."

At first Mrs. Candler touched the mushrooms with gingerly fingertips; but presently she became interested and began to help sort them. And then, with an impatient exclamation, she stripped off the rings that weighted her slender fingers and tossed them upon a near-by stone.

Reginald stood for a while picking at the mushrooms; then he tugged impatiently at his

mother's hand. "Aw, come on, Mama!" he said. "Let 's find some hop-toads to throw stones at. I bet I can squush every one we find."

"In a minute, darling," said his mother. "Clever, high-spirited children are so restless, are n't they, Mrs. Harvie? Look, sweet pet! See that pretty poll parrot."

Reginald, disregarding Mrs. Harvie's warning "Take care! He 'll peck you!" ran to the cage, and promptly had his fingers nipped.

"I 'll pay you for that, you horrid bad bird!" he bawled.

He jerked up a stick and began to hit at the parrot, which in turn screamed and struck at him.

Jimps caught the angry youngster firmly by the arm.

"Stop that," he said, without raising or hurrying his voice.

"Let me alone. You got nothing to do with me, you dirty poor boy!" Reginald cried angrily, kicking fiercely at the boy's bare shins.

"I ain't goin' to let you pester that bird," Jimps said quietly. "Get away."

Reginald backed off to a safe distance. "I will if I want to!" he shouted. "You ain't my boss. Who 's afraid of you? I ain't."

But, for all his bold words, he did not venture again within reach of the mountaineer's sturdy young arm. For a while he vented his spite by throwing pebbles at Jimps; then he wandered to the shed that served as a kitchen and banged furiously with a frying-pan on pots and kettles. When he saw the Starwink campers coming up the path from the lake, he dropped the pan and ran and caught Sandy Harvie by the hand.

"What made you not be here when I came?" he demanded. "Why weren't you here to play with me?"

"I didn't know you were coming," Sandy said politely. He was the youngest of the Harvies, the twelve-year-old petted "baby" of the camp. "O Mother! we 've had the bestest time!" he exclaimed.

"I got a lovely picture of the Portal; the light 's just right," said Elinor Lane, whose bright, ugly face looked like a comic picture.

"We had a jolly boat-race," said Mary

Watkins, a vivid brunette, coming up arm in arm with fair-haired Anne Lewis. "Anne and I raced against Chris and Harrison; and we almost beat them—did n't we, Anne?"

Christopher Harvie set his head nodding like a Chinese idol's, and chanted teasingly, "A miss is as good as a—"

"As a boy, to be sure!" interrupted a merry voice.

"Come now, Page! You might at least have said a *mis*ter!" retorted Harrison Ruffin, a brown-faced, tawny-haired youngster, very like his cousin Page.

"Here, Pagie! leave your old book and let me tell you about my picture," said Elinor, starting toward the hammock. Suddenly she stopped. "Oh, how lovely!" she exclaimed, pointing to Mrs. Candler's rings lying on the stone. "Look, girls! Did you ever see anything so exquiss? Those gorgeous colors! fairly blazing in the sunlight!"

"Precious!" "Lovely!" "Scrumptious!" exclaimed the other girls.

"Huh!" said a slow voice. "They ain't nothin' to make sich a fuss over."

The young campers stared at the boy—barefooted, in dingy overalls and torn shirt—who had turned from the parrot and was gazing over Page's shoulder at the rings.

"My word! You look like a judge of gems!" Christopher said, laughing.

Jimps stood calm and unabashed. "I got sparklers prettier 'n them little few things; lots of 'em, an' all colors, like a rainbow."

There was a shout of laughter in which matter-of-fact, truth-loving Elinor did not join.

"Why, boy!" she exclaimed. "Those are diamonds and rubies and emeralds—perfect beauties and worth ever so much money. One little diamond costs—oh! a hundred dollars; and big ones cost ever so much more. I don't reckon you ever saw such jewels before, and as for having any— What makes him talk such nonsense?" she asked Minta, who had come nearer, again impatiently summoning her brother.

"Ef he say it 's so, I ain't got no call to say it ain't so," Minta answered stolidly. "You come on, Jimps."

"Oh, he 's found some crystals like those we

got in the cave, or some bits of broken glass," said Harrison Ruffin.

"They ain't glass, my sparklers ain't," declared Jimps.

"Show them to us," said Elinor; "show us your 'sparklers,' as you call them, and let us see—"

"I won't. You got nothin' to do with 'em."

"Then I don't believe you have—anything. I don't believe a word you say," Elinor said severely.

"Suit yoreself. B'lieve it or don't b'lieve it," Jimps answered indifferently, turning back to the parrot.

"Oh! everybody stop spatting," cried Page. "Let me tell you the most wonderful thing! You all know how cross Zillo is? Well, this boy—" And she proceeded to tell about his making friends with the parrot. "Who is he, anyway?" she asked, lowering her voice. "Do you know, Harrison? That girl—his sister, I suppose—calls him Jimps, and her name is Minta."

"They are the Farlans," answered Harrison, who had spent his early boyhood in these

mountains. "That Jim Farlan—'Whistling Jimps,' they call him—roams the woods like a wild thing. The others are Minta and Nance and Looey and Sam. I don't know the baby's name. They are squatters, and live here, there, anywhere. They 've just moved to a cabin at the foot of Deer Mountain."

"Can you really put your finger in that cage? Won't Zillo peck you?" Alexander asked the young mountaineer. "See where he bit me; and when I was putting seeds in his cage," he said in an aggrieved little voice.

"Here, you Jimps!" said Minta, catching her brother roughly by the shoulder. "You come on an' le's sell them minnows."

"Sell minnows!" laughed Chris. "I did n't think he 'd deal in anything smaller than whales. He 'd better be seeing about his jewel-mine. Is it anywhere near Bear Bluff? We 'd like to look it up—we 're going there for a picnic to-morrow, and we might bring back a handful of 'sparklers.' "

"I don't think it 's any laughing matter to tell such stories," Elinor said solemnly. "He ought to be ashamed of himself."

Christopher laughed again. "P'shaw, Elinor!" he said. "Be reasonable! Any one that can charm Zillo—why should n't he have a diamond-mine or a pearl-fishery on top of the Alleghanies?"

"Oh! he 's an absurd little liar," said Mrs. Candler. "Come, Reginald; come, my sweet pet! Let 's go back to the hotel and put on a white sailor suit. Mama wants her precious boy to be the prettiest, sweetest thing in the dining-room this evening."

"I ain't going to the hotel, and I ain't going to dress up," replied Reginald. "I 'm going down the road, to throw stones at hop-toads!"

"Not now, sweet pet; it 's nearly supper-time," coaxed his mother. "Let me get my rings and we— Why, I laid them—did n't I lay my rings—"

"On the stone by the camp-chair you were in," called Mrs. Harvie, who was putting the mushrooms in a pan on the alcohol-stove.

"But they are n't here."

"Of course they are. On that flat stone," Mrs. Harvie insisted. "I saw you put them there."

"Yes; but—they are n't!"

"We were looking at them there a minute ago," said Elinor.

"They may have rolled down into the grass," said Mrs. Harvie. "Chris! Harrison! David! find Mrs. Candler's rings."

They looked carefully—combing the grass; searching on the rock over and over again, as if the rings had gone away with a vagrant sunbeam and might now come back; feeling the ground, as if the jewels might be there, invisible but tangible. All in vain!

Mrs. Candler was increasing her loss by recounting the value and association of each gem: "The solitaire was my engagement-ring. Aunt Mary paid three hundred dollars for the ruby. And I gave nine hundred, Cousin Tom's legacy, for the diamond cluster; my husband always said diamonds were such a good investment. The emerald was my mother's. And they 're lost—every one—all lost and go-one!" She sobbed.

"Maybe you moved them," said Harrison.

"I have n't touched them since I put them here," answered Mrs. Candler, placing her

hand on the rock for the fortieth time. "Oh! I know what 's become of them!" she exclaimed, turning suddenly and fiercely toward Jimps. "That boy stole them. Of course he did. He 's been hanging round here ever since I came.— You little thief! Give me my rings!"

Jimps looked at her and made a grimace; then he chirruped to the parrot, gave it a final pat, and joined the other young Farlans at the roadside.

Mrs. Candler ran after him. "If you don't give back my rings—at once, I say!—I'll have you arrested and put in jail," she threatened.

"Now, Jimps! See what a mess you 're in, meddlin' with things you 've got no business with," said Minta, who had been watching from a distance the search for the jewels.

Page looked thoughtfully at the boy. Was Mrs. Candler right in her surmise? The rings had certainly been on that stone. And now they were gone. Where else could suspicion fall? And yet, she could not feel that this gay, quaint urchin was a thief, even though his own sister seemed to accuse him. She went up to him and spoke in an undertone.

"That lady put four rings on the stone," she said. "I saw her. If—if you picked them up, now give them back."

Jimps's clear eyes met hers for a second.

"I ain't teched her rings," he said.

"You did," cried Mrs. Candler. "You took them, and you 've got to give them back!"

Jimps laughed. He sprang like a chipmunk upon a big rock at the edge of the camp-ground, and began to eat an apple Page had given him. He finished it calmly while the excited little woman stood hurling threats at him. Then he caught a hemlock branch, swung back and forth, and, suddenly letting loose the branch, made a flying leap that landed him far up the road.

"Come back, you thief, and give me my rings. Stop him, boys; stop him!" called Mrs. Candler, scuttling after Jimps as fast as high heels and narrow skirt would permit.

The boy stood poised ready for flight, and grinned at her with impish glee.

"Uh, Jimps! quit yore prankin'," commanded Minta. "Ef hotel folks git down on us, old man Pursilot won't leave us come thar

to sell minnows. Mammy 'll beat you; she 'll beat you to a frazzle. Come back an' behave yoreself."

Jimps scowled and stamped his feet and shook his head and gibbered angrily, but he returned to the edge of the camp-ground.

"I ain't teched her old rings; I ain't been to that rock," he muttered.

"Of course you took them. They could n't walk away. And no one else has been near here. You crept behind us and slipped over there and took them." Mrs. Candler had now firmly convinced herself of the truth of her surmise; she was so sure the boy had stolen her rings that she was almost ready to think she had actually seen him take them.

"Jimps, why n't you give the old woman her rings?" asked Minta. It was no harm, she thought, to pick up things you saw lying around; the harm was in not returning them when some one who had the power to do it threatened to make trouble for you. "Why n't you give 'em back?" she repeated.

"I can't give what I ain't got," Jimps answered sullenly.

The campers stood on the edge of this controversy, gazing uncomfortably at one another and recalling what Jimps had said about "sparklers." Did he indeed have jewels, the real things, that he had stolen?

"He must have taken them," Mary said in an undertone. "There 's no one else."

"I don't believe he did," Page said slowly and thoughtfully. Suddenly her face brightened. "O Mrs. Candler!" She ran up the road and put her hand on the little woman's arm. "Jimps Farlan did n't take your rings. I 've been thinking it over, and I remember just where he went and what he did. You see, he was standing by that chestnut-tree. He came and looked over my shoulder, and then he went, back that way, to Zillo's cage. He did n't—he could n't—get the rings, for I was between him and them all the time."

"Of course he took them," snapped Mrs. Candler. "I put them there; now they are gone. What else could have become of them?"

"I just know he did n't go to that rock," Page repeated positively.

"I cert'n'y ain't been thar," said Jimps.

"Ef mammy beats me to death, ef they hang me or jail me—I ain't took them old rings."

"I know you didn't," said Page, giving him a reassuring smile. "You didn't do it, and they shan't hurt you. I am going to stand by you."

"As Page says, she would have seen him if he had gone to that rock," said Mrs. Harvie. "Let 's look again. Perhaps—"

"She was not noticing," Mrs. Candler interrupted. "He slipped by her. You boys must go with me and march the little thief straight to Mr. Pursilot to be searched."

"We must, eh?" muttered Harrison.

"He 's got to give back my rings. And I am going to ask Mr. Pursilot to forbid these little wretches ever, ever coming again to the hotel grounds."

"Then we can't sell no more minnows," wailed Nance.

"We can't git no more nickels for weeds," cried Looey, looking dolefully at the wild flowers she had hoped to sell to a hotel guest.

"O Mrs. Candler! That isn't fair," protested Page. "You haven't any right to make

these poor children suffer because you suspect Jimps—''

''Suspect! I know,'' Mrs. Candler said angrily. ''He may have hidden my rings. If I ne-ever get them back''—her voice trembled at the thought—''I shall always believe and know he took them. Come, boys, take him to Mr. Pursilot. Here, Reginald. Don't give me your fist like that; what have you in your hand?''

''Nothing.''

''Don't annoy me when I am worried to death already,'' she said sharply. ''Take my hand. You 'll fall on these stones and get hurt.''

As she jerked at his fingers, he suddenly opened his fist and threw down something that, falling in a patch of sunlight, glittered and twinkled like impish eyes mocking her anger and suspicion.

The lost jewels!

Mrs. Candler gasped and stared, and scrambled to seize them.

''Here they are, all of them!'' she exclaimed. Then she wheeled toward her son. ''Reginald!

Reginald Candler! And you had my rings all that time, and saw me looking for them—distressed, wretched— Oh! you naughty, naughty boy! Aren't you ashamed—''

Reginald interrupted his mother's reproof by throwing himself flat on the ground and howling at the top of his voice.

''It—it wasn't a nice thing for you to do, my son,'' Mrs. Candler said in an apologetic tone. ''But don't cry.''

Reginald howled the more loudly, emphasizing his screams by kicking and pounding the ground with his fists.

His mother tried to lift him up, saying soothingly: ''Why, son! sweet pet! Are you so grieved at having annoyed mama? Don't cry, darling; don't cry. You 'll make yourself ill. Get up and let 's go home, dear. It 's all right now; it 's all right.''

''It surely isn't 'all right,' Mrs. Candler,'' said Page's severe young voice. ''You believed that boy stole your rings and you accused him of it. Don't you think you owe him an apology?''

''An apology? That little ragamuffin?''

gasped Mrs. Candler. "Why, why—he might have stolen the rings. I don't doubt he would have done it if he had had a chance. Probably Reginald saved them by picking them up. The dear child is so observant and clever! I expect he saw that boy trying to sneak there and get them, and so he ran and picked them up." She patted her son on the head. He had stopped screaming, and scrambled to his feet, allowing himself to be pacified as soon as he found he was in no danger of punishment. "Was n't that it, my darling?" she asked. "Did n't you take mama's rings just to keep them for her?"

"Yes," replied Reginald; "I took them to keep for you. Come on, Mama. Come on away from these horrid mean folks."

He tugged at her hand, and she went obediently up the road.

"Well! Was n't that a silly shame!" exclaimed Chris, looking after them.

The other campers laughed—all except Page, who was too indignant to see the ludicrous side of the affair. She ran up the road after the Farlan children. They were going on to the

hotel, calmly accepting Mrs. Candler's injustice and relieved that the threatened punishment had not fallen on Jimps and involved them all.

"Good-by," Page said, giving Jimps's hand an impulsive, friendly clasp. "I am sorry Mrs. Candler was so unkind, so unfair. It was horrid of her not to apologize."

"I did n't mind nothin' she said," Jimps answered slowly. He started up the road, and then turned back. "Say!" He cocked his head sideways, with his eyes shining like a bird's. "I would n't mind lettin' *you* see them sparklers o' mine."

CHAPTER II

THE next morning the Starwink campers went picnicking. Ten o'clock found them at Sweetwater Spring, which gurgled from under a great rock below the eastern crest of Lake Mountain. They drank and drank again of the delicious cool water.

"This spring 's sure got the right name," said little Sandy.

"Is n't this perfect for a picnic?" exclaimed Anne Lewis. "Drinks close at hand, and this lovely rock table."

"Oh, it is so lovely!" Elinor Lane sighed, as she fingered her camera and looked from the tangle and tumble of ferns and rocks down to sunlit Hemlock Hollow, across to tree-clad Treasure Mountain, and on to Indian Head and the parallel ridges beyond, lying in pale and paler blue lines along the horizon. "It 's the color, the atmosphere, the—oh! everything I can't get in a picture," she mourned.

"Look at the picture we 've made here, Miss Crape-hanger, and cheer up," counseled Christopher. "Our first job was sure a good one. Gee! don't you wish Mr. Kinman could see it?"

Mr. Kinman was the friend who had inspired the Starwink campers to form a band of Flower Friends, the summer before, to protect and foster native flowers. Here were the first plants they had set out—green-veined grass-of-Parnassus, feathery white foam-flower, graceful jewel-weed, gorgeous Turk's-cap lilies. What delicate and gay beauty they gave the place!

"This spring was always pretty," said Anne Lewis.

"We 've made it prettier by bringing these flowers here," declared Mary Watkins.

"Yes," Page agreed. She paused a minute, then went on hesitatingly: "There 's one place —I don't know that it ever could be pretty—but I do wish we could improve Squirrel Spring."

There was a chorus of astonishment and dissent:

"Why, Page! What could we do to that ugly old place?"

"It isn't a spring, it 's just an oozy hole in the mud."

"It 's so horrid I hate even to pass it," declared Elinor.

Harrison did not like to see Page look disappointed, and so he gave her plan lukewarm approval: "If the spring were deepened and the channel dug out so the water would flow freely—"

"The cattle would trample it down again," said Chris.

"Oh! we could wall it round," Page suggested, brightening. "Could n't we, Harrison?"

"We 'd like to leave the mountains a souvenir of our happy summer," said Mrs. Harvie; "a pleasant fountain instead of a muddy hole in that beautiful woodland."

"We could n't."

"We could."

"Let 's go there—say, Friday," said Page, "and try—"

"To gild a mud-hole and paint skunk-cabbage, as Shakspere would say."

"Come, come!" laughed Mrs. Harvie. "When my son Christopher begins to mis-

quote poetry it 's time to change the subject. We 'll go to Squirrel Spring on Friday and see what we can do to beautify—or unuglify—the place. Now I am going to gather some huckleberries for our lunch. Who 'll go with me?"

"Oh! we don't want huckleberries," Page exclaimed. "Let 's go to Bear Bluff and explore those holes and hollows. Maybe we 'll find a real cave."

"Wait till this afternoon," said Mary. "Let 's help Mrs. Harvie pick berries."

"Oh, no! Let 's go right now," insisted Page. "You 'll go, Harrison, won 't you? you and Chris?"

"No." Chris answered for himself and his chum. "While the squaws and papoose"—he pinched Sandy's ear—"are picking hucks, we 're going to get wood and make a fire. We 've got bacon to broil and marshmallows to toast."

"Wait, Page, and let 's go to Bear Bluff after lunch," urged Harrison.

Page tossed her head. "I don't want to wait," she said. "I can go alone, if you 'll not go with me."

She walked away, slowly at first, hoping that some of her companions would change their minds and join her. But none of them did, and so she went on alone. She followed the foot of the rock ledge, which became higher and more precipitous, until presently she reached a break in the wall. A huge mass was split off in such a way as to form a gorge that narrowed at the farther end. Near the open end, three or four red birches reared their trunks like slim, straight columns beside the rock wall, and spread their foliage in the sunshine above.

Page clambered along the gorge, mounting easily on the steplike ledges of stone. After a little she came to a place that offered a choice of ways—one going upward to the top of the gorge, the other dropping downward to an unsunned abyss. She peered into the dark recess.

"It would be fun to go in there," she said to herself. "Mr. Sibold says you can see where bears have scratched the rocks with their claws. He says they stay here in the winter, but in the summer they are out in the woods."

From the distance came the voices of her comrades. Elinor was shrilling a question, and Chris's laughter rose above hatchet-blows and snapping boughs.

Page frowned. "The boys certainly might have come with me. But oh, no! They think I must wait till they are ready to come. I—I believe I 'll go down there by myself. I 've got my flash-light."

After a moment's hesitation, she turned downward. It was easy to thread a way among the tumbled rocks as far as the summer noonlight penetrated; but presently the rock masses closed around her and the light grew dimmer. She paused and peered into the cavern from which black darkness seemed to pour out. Then she glanced wistfully behind her.

"But I 'll not go back!" she exclaimed.

She pulled out her flash-light and pointed it downward. After the glare of noonday it seemed a mere fire-fly in the darkness.

"I—I wonder if it needs a new battery?" questioned Page.

As her eyes grew accustomed to the gloom,

the light seemed brighter and the way ahead appeared not difficult. There was a tunnel-like opening under rocks that had fallen against the cliff.

"I 'll show the boys I don't have to wait for them," Page thought. "They 'll be surprised when they find out where I 've been all alone."

She groped along the winding tunnel, stopping now and then to look around and examine the rocks for marks of bear claws. On the left hand there was a rough, solid wall. On the right there were irregular rock masses, with crevices and holes—mostly midnight dark, but from behind one great stone came a glimmer of light, like faint daylight that had forgotten the sunshine. Beyond that stone the tunnel narrowed so that it did not afford a passageway. Evidently, instead of leading into a cave as Page had hoped, the tunnel merely followed the split-off rock and ended where that rejoined the cliff. And now the flash-light was indeed failing, and threatened to leave her in darkness. She turned to hurry back.

As she groped along the tunnel, Page heard a soft purr and a yawn and then the rustling

of dry grass. It was such a good-natured, sleepy little sound that after the first start she was more curious than frightened. She heard the noise again, and then she realized that it came from under a ledge at the foot of the rock wall.

She turned the flash-light, and discovered on a bed of matted moss and grass, what seemed a ball of reddish-gray fur marked with dusky spots and bands. As she looked, there emerged groping paws and legs, and heads with bright eyes. The furry mass disentangled itself into three soft bodies, little creatures that purred and mewed and pawed playfully at one another.

"Why, they are kittens, the prettiest, darlingest things!" exclaimed Page. "But how big they are! the biggest kittens I ever saw! How on earth did you get 'way out here? I reckon people were mean to the mother cat and she ran off to the woods. O you beauties! I 'd like to take you home with me. Won't Mary be surprised to see what I 've found? Kitty!"

She stooped to stroke the one nearest her, but it spit at her and scurried away, with a frightened miaul.

"I would n't hurt you, little dear darling!" Page said coaxingly.

She followed and attempted to caress it, but it ruffled its fur and threatened her with its little claws. Then it and its mates took refuge under the rock ledge, miauling and crying piteously.

"Come, come! I don't want to scare you to death. If that 's the way you feel about me, I 'll trot along," Page said, turning away.

Just then the cries were echoed—no, not echoed, but answered by a sound that made her blood run cold—sharp, snarling cries, repeated again and again and again, each time louder and fiercer and nearer. Page started to run, and then with a gasp she stopped. For the sounds were coming down the tunnel. That furious, savage creature—was it a bear whose den she had run into?—was between her and the mouth of the gorge! Terror-stricken, she stood as if rooted to the spot.

Suddenly there appeared in the gloom two glowing balls. They looked like huge moonstones, but moonstones that were alive and angry and that moved toward her. For one

terrified instant Page stood stock-still. Then she turned her flash-light, and saw behind the gleaming orbs a dark mass of fur.

As the light flashed in the creature's face, it stopped and gave an angry snarl. The kittens uttered whining, importunate calls, urging their mother to come to them. She answered with a wailing cry, scratching her claws on the rock and arching her back, but she did not go forward. Though she was bold and eager to attack the intruder, she dared not approach that fearful, mysterious light.

She sprang on the large projecting rock at the outer edge of the tunnel, and crouched for a downward spring. Page turned the flash-light just in time. With a snarl, the beast drew back and cowered on the rock. The light blinked—for an instant Page thought that it was out—but it gleamed again with a dull yellow glare. The creature backed away, jumped from the rock, and, with her head down to avoid the light, crept step by step along the tunnel toward Page. Ten feet away, she crouched to spring. By the flickering light the terrified girl saw the body arched like a bow, the sinewy legs, the

threatening claws, the snarling lips, the sharp, cruel teeth.

So far, the duel between the beast trying to get to her young and the girl unwillingly blocking the way had been a silent one on Page's part. Now she found her voice and shrieked:

"Harrison! Chris! Come! Come help me! Oh, help me! help me! Help! help!"

Her voice died in the windings of the rock. No sound of it went across the pleasant, sunlit mountain-side to the merry party at Sweetwater Spring. The only answer was the snarling of the brute, rising into a fierce yowl above the girl's terrified cries, and the impatient calls of the kittens summoning their mother. The beast came nearer. The light was now shining very faintly, a mere glimmering speck.

And then, from behind the rock on the side of the tunnel, there came a queer soft little purring sound. The beast turned her head; her snarl died away in a sort of answering purr.

That soft little noise was even more terrifying to Page than the furious cries, for it took away her faintest hope of escape. It was, she thought, the call of the wild creature's mate,

which was creeping toward her through a crevice in the rock. In a moment it, too, would attack her. She could not fight them both. While she was trying to fend off one, the other would spring.

For a second that seemed endless, Page stood paralyzed with terror. But she must keep the new foe off as long as possible. She turned her flash-light toward the side of the tunnel; and—the light flickered and went out! She uttered a piercing shriek, a wild cry of terror and despair, let the useless flash-light fall clattering on the rock, and, throwing her hands over her face, shrank back from the expected attack.

And then, instead of that dreaded agony, there came a gentle, drawling voice:

"Don't holler. She ain't goin' to hurt you."

The sweet, sleepy, soothing, purring calls were repeated—appealing, luring, irresistible. The kittens stopped miauling and gave soft answering sounds. They rolled out of their nest—Page could hear them slipping along the rock beside her—and went with little eager

cries toward the calling voice. The mother began to protest, but that gentle, coaxing call took the fierce heart out of her, and she changed her snarl to a reluctant, appeased purr. One by one, the kittens went through the crevice beside the rock, from which issued a streak of faint light. Their mother uttered an uncertain questioning call, between a mew and a snarl. Then Page heard her padding feet; for a moment her moving body obscured the dim light.

"She 's come out now. You go on up the tunnel, out o' her way."

Page groped along upward. It seemed a horribly long time that she went stumbling on, fearing there would come behind her a soft patter, fierce snarls, attacking claws and teeth. But nothing happened. At last the gloom in front of her grew less dense, and then she saw a faint ray of light. She hurried to the opening of the tunnel, clambered out into the gorge, and, trembling so violently that she could not stand, sank down on a rock.

It was very quiet and peaceful. A vagrant breeze stirred the foliage of the birch-trees and

set the shadows and sunshine dancing on the gray rocks. From afar came the voices and laughter of her friends. Nearer at hand, she heard still those strange, sweet, coaxing calls.

"You all right now?" asked a soft voice.

Page did not answer. If her trembling legs had supported her, she would have fled, without a look or a word for her rescuer. But as she sat there in the warm, bright outdoors and regained strength, she recovered courage also. And so presently she went down the gorge and turned to the left, around the rock that, split off from the cliff, made the outer wall of the gorge and of the tunnel.

There, in the full sunlight, a boy was sprawled upon a large flat rock in the middle of a thicket of ferns. One of the kittens was on his lifted forearm, another was nuzzling under his chin, the third fat uncertain little body was scrambling up his leg. The mother—watchful, alert, a little shy, but not at all frightened—was standing near the crevice in the rocks from which she had just emerged.

Perhaps a leaf rustled or a twig cracked underfoot, perhaps it was merely the instinct

of the wild creature that recognized the presence of an intruder,—as Page came from behind the rock and stared at the strange sylvan scene, the beast turned her head. Her fur bristled and she uttered a low snarl.

"She won't hurt you," said the boy, looking at Page without moving.

"It—it 's you—Jimps Farlan!" she exclaimed.

In her terror she had not recognized his voice. And now she gazed wonderingly at him lying there among the wild creatures as if he were one of them.

"She won't hurt you," he repeated.

Indeed, the beast showed no signs of fight. The snarling cry died in her throat, and was followed by a summoning call that brought the kittens scrambling from Jimps to her. With them at her heels, she went back into the crevice.

"Is—is that all the big she is?" asked Page, looking in amazment at the reddish, black-marked animal with black-tipped bobtail. Although it was muscular and powerful-looking for its size, it was not more than two feet long.

"There in the tunnel, bristled up, with claws out and eyes shining—oh! it seemed huge. I thought it was a bear, or—or— What *is* it?"

"She 's a old bobcat," Jimps answered. "They got the name o' bein' the fightin'est things in the mountains. Pap used to say it took a good man to fight his weight in wildcats. She mought 'a' clawed yore eyes out. What make you go in thar an' git twixen her an' her babies?"

"I did n't mean to," said Page. "I did n't know they were there. I scrambled in to explore the place, and I heard the little things, and then I saw them. I thought they were tame kittens—only I 'd never seen such big ones—and I was trying to make friends. Then she came—that awful, snarling, crouching, horrible beast! Ugh! I was so scared! I thought she was going to pounce on me. But she kept back till my light gave out."

"Yore light skeered her off," said Jimps. "Lucky for you! They aim for the throat, an' fight tooth an' claw. But they don't pester folks 'less you git in thar way."

"I thought surely it was a bear that was go-

ing to kill me," said Page. "A bobcat, you call it? Is that a panther?"

"Uh, naw. Some folks call 'em wildcats. Thar ain't no painters here'bouts now. Folks say they used to roam these mountains. They 're bigger 'n bobcats. Pap's granddaddy knowed a woman over on Wolf Creek that shot one nine foot long. I sure would like to seen it."

"I would n't," Page said decidedly.

It was so bright and peaceful and safe out here in the open that she forgot her terror. She stood looking down with a half-smile at the boy, who lay quite still, cuddled on the sun-warmed rock. What a wild charm there was in the grotesque little face! What was the heart of the charm—the mobile red lips that pursed themselves into such alluring sweet notes? or the comical uptilted nose? or the little pointed chin? or the quaint peaked eyebrows? or the clear bright eyes under the long dark lashes?

"How did you come here?" Page asked presently, with a start.

"Walked," Jimps answered briefly. After

a while he added: "That slim, fun-makin' boy said yestiddy you was comin' here to-day; so I jest roamed over."

"I 'm thankful you did," said Page. "You kept that brute from killing me."

He shook his head. It seemed as if speech were troublesome to him, and he had a trick of frequent gestures, of drifting from words into whistles and chirps and vague woodland sounds like rippling brooks or breeze-swayed boughs. "She mought 'a' clawed you pretty bad, but she would n't 'a' killed you," he said at last. "They do kill lambs an' things. But not folks. An' they don't fight you 'less you git 'em cornered or bother thar young ones. They 're skeered o' folks."

"They were n't afraid of you," said Page.

"Uh, naw. Ef you had n't 'a' come, them kittens would 'a' stayed an' played with me half the day, an' presen'ly the old mammy bob-cat would 'a' come an' lay down here on the rock. Things ain't feared o' me."

"Things?" repeated Page.

"Things," said Jimps again; "bobcats, an' squirrels, an' birds; *things*."

"Do you mean to say," inquired Page, "that other creatures are n't afraid of you, any more than those kittens or our parrot?"

"Thar ain't a thing in the mountains that won't friend with me," said the boy. "Nothin' but snakes." He made a shivering grimace. "I don 't call snakes 'things.' I hate 'em. Eigh!" He put his loathing in a cry at once shrill and guttural.

"They are horrible," Page agreed.

"A rattler bit my baby sister," said Jimps, turning from the sunlight and crouching down on the rock. "It bit her on the neck. Ugh! She screeched—till her throat swelled so she could n't holler."

"It—it did n't kill her?" faltered Page, appalled by the change in Jimps, the mortal hatred and horror on the face a minute before so care-free and blithe.

He nodded.

"I was mighty little—she was the baby younger 'n me—but ev'y time I see a rattler, I c'n see her face, swelled an' spotty purple. Ugh! I hate snakes." His face was pallid, his voice was strained and difficult, as if his ex-

ceeding great fear were a bodily thing that caught him by the throat.

"Are n't you afraid a rattlesnake will bite you, roaming about the woods?" asked Page.

"I keep out thar way," said the boy. "Ef I chance nigh one, I run 'way 'fore it charms me."

"Charms you!" exclaimed Page. "I 've heard people say snakes charm birds and frogs. I always thought that was just a tale. But people—surely not!"

"They sure do. They stretch tharselves out, an' weave thar heads up an' down, with thar mean little eyes shinin' on you. An' you stand foot-fast. Then they strike. They hit you like a flash o' lightning."

"Nonsense! You never knew a snake to charm any one really, did you?"

"One charmed my pappy," Jimps said slowly and impressively.

"What!" exclaimed Page.

He nodded his head emphatically. "It sure did. He e'en-a'most died."

"Tell me about it," said Page.

Jimps merely shrugged his shoulders; but,

when she urged him, he gave a sigh and put the story into words.

"Pappy snared a rattler onct," he said. "He was aimin' to skin it an' sell its hide to summer folks. An' 't was sich a fat old fellow he was goin' to make rattlesnake oil to cure rheumatiz. Well, 't wa'n't no use to kill it 'fore night, for its tail would n't die till sundown. So pappy sot thar lookin' at the snake, an' it lay lookin' at him. Presen'ly mammy come out an' say, 'Why n't you hang up that rattler?' Pap did n't say nothin', an' mammy cotch up the snare an' hung it up on a peg.

"Come a while, it swung down limp an' stringy—an' then pappy drapped liken he was dead. Mammy knowed right away what was the matter. She snatched down the rattler an' loosed the snare. An' when that snake wiggled, pappy come to life. I tell you, we was glad to kill that old rattler next day."

"Next day! Why did n't you kill it at once?" asked Page.

"Lawzee, naw!" exclaimed Jimps. "Pappy would 'a' died ef we 'd killed the snake 'fore the charm was off 'n him."

He was so much in earnest that, although Page could not quite believe his story, it impressed her deeply. She was about to ask another question, when there came a halloo:

"Page! O Page! where are you? Come to lunch, Pagie!"

"It 's Harrison," said Page. "They are pretty late thinking about me. I might be dead by this time."

"Pa-a-age!"

"Whoo-ee! I 'm coming," she called.

She turned back to Jimps. He shook himself and passed the back of his hand over his eyes. Then he sprawled out in the sunshine and spoke in his usual slow, sweet voice:

"H'm! It feels good in the sun."

"Come and have lunch with us," said Page.

He shook his head.

"I wish you would," she urged. "We 'd be so glad to have you."

Jimps did not answer.

"Well, I must go," said Page. "Thank you and thank you for saving me from the wildcat. Good-by. Or perhaps I 'll see you when you come up the path."

"I ain't travelin' the path," said the boy. "I 'm goin' back like I come—that-a-way." He pointed to the unbroken woods at the northwest.

"Are n't you afraid of getting lost?"

Jimps laughed. "I go anywhar. Three year ago I coursed my way over in West Virginia. It was forty mile; some say it 's fifty. It took me two days to walk it. Pappy p'inted the way an' I coursed it."

Page looked at him in amazement. "Three years ago you went all that way by yourself! Why, you were n't— How old are you now?"

"I 'm younger 'n Minta, an' thar was Mandy twixen me an' Nance," said Jimps.

"You went that distance, without even following a road, when you were—you could n't have been more than ten years old," said Page. "Why did you go?"

"I dunno. Nothin'. I jest wanted to see 'yon' the mountains."

"It 's the most wonderful thing I ever heard of," said Page. "No! The most wonderful thing is the way you make friends with animals."

"I know a place whar thar 's three kinds o' squirrels," said Jimps: "gray squirrels, big old fox-squirrels, an' little red mountain boomers. An' they all know me."

"Oh, I 'd adore to see them. Do take me there," Page said eagerly.

He shook his head. "I ain't nuver showed that place to nobody," he said. "I ain't nuver keered to have nobody in the woods with me; nobody but Grief."

"Grief!" exclaimed Page.

"Um-h'm." The word was merely a name to him. "He was sich a fat, happy baby. He 'd lay by the hour watchin' things an' cooin' to 'em, an' they wa' n't feared o' him."

"Oh! Grief was the name of your little brother. Where is he now?"

"Dead."

Page gave a murmur of sympathy.

"The things don't like folks." Jimps paused, then he said: "But I c'n show you them sparklers. They 're in a place nobody knows but me. Can't nobody see 'em what thought I stole that old woman's rings. You c'n see 'em, ef you come by yoreself to Fallin' Water."

"I certainly will come," said Page. "To-morrow—no, the day after. We are to picnic at Squirrel Spring. I 'll slip away from the others and come. Oh, won't it be fun!"

"I c'n come nigh the spring an' whistle for you—so-o. Say! You better not roam by yoreself 'long Fallin' Water. You mought come 'cross folks."

"Folks? Who? And what if I did?" inquired Page.

"I dunno. I dunno nothin' 'bout 'em, an' I ain't tryin' to find out nothin'. 'T ain't none o' my business. Some folks is worse 'n bobcats to come on unexpected."

"I don't believe that," said Page. "Well, I 'll be on the lookout for you Friday morning. Good-by."

CHAPTER III

"HEIGH-OH!" Chris gave a sigh, half feigned, half real. "Gee, Page! this place is hopeless. Bog, squash, slush, quagmire; why, it isn't a spring at all. And here we 've tramped two miles from Hilltop Lake, two useless old miles from a canoe or diving-board." He sighed again.

"The—the trees here are lovely," said Page, gazing at the stately oaks and chestnuts on the gently sloping side of Gap Mountain.

Chris laughed. "It isn't the trees we are to 'welfare work,' is it? Look at that spring. I just ask you to look at it!"

Squirrel Spring was indeed an unlovely place. The herds of cattle that grazed the summer mountains had trampled the oozing water, the mold, and the dead leaves into a thick black mud. If ever flowers and fair plants had been there, they had been destroyed. Now there was only a great clump of skunk-

cabbage, spreading abroad a carrion odor to lure insects for it to devour.

"Shut your eyes—" said Elinor.

"And your nose—faugh!" exclaimed Mary.

"Do, with your mind's eye, what Mr. Kinman calls the 'real seeing,'" Elinor went on. "Can't you see this spring—a clear little pool under these lovely trees, with a flower-bordered brook?"

"I see a lot of hard work ahead of us," said Chris, dolefully.

"Let 's get to it. Here!" Harrison handed Chris the hoe, and flourished the spade in air. "Hey for the shovel and the hoe! The first thing is to clean out the spring and deepen the channel. Dave, suppose you and Sandy bring stones to wall in the spring; all sizes and shapes for the sides; we 'll need a big flat one for the top, to protect it from the cattle. We must scoop out a watering-place for them down-stream."

"While you boys are doing that, we 'll get flowers to transplant here," said Mrs. Harvie.

"There are lots of them—jewel-weed, turtle-head, asters, cardinal-flowers, steeple-bush,

swamp honeysuckle—at the foot of the mountain,'' suggested Anne Lewis.

The girls strolled away with Mrs. Harvie—all except Page Ruffin, who announced that she was going to help get stones. She worked diligently for a while, but with an abstracted, listening mien that the boys were too busy to notice. When she heard a clear, sweet, summoning whistle, she started and dropped a stone. ''I 'm going to leave you boys to finish this,'' she said. ''Look for me back when you see me.''

''Here! this is your job,'' said Chris. ''You 've dragged us in it; now stay and take your own medicine.''

Page gave him a mocking grimace.

''Don't go away, Pagie!'' begged Sandy. ''Everything 's so much more fun with you.''

''Thank you!'' Page swept him a curtsy. ''But I 've something special on hand.''

''Where are you going?'' Harrison asked.

''Oh! 'Through the woods and far away,' '' she answered lightly.

''I 'll go with you,'' he said. ''Here, Dave! you take the spade.''

"I don't want you."

Harrison well knew that self-willed uptilt of his cousin's determined little chin, and he hesitated and looked around for Mrs. Harvie; but she was out of sight.

"Page! Page!" He followed his cousin. "Please don't stray off alone. I 'm sure Mrs. Harvie would n't like it, nor Cousin Dabney. He asked me to look out for you. You have such a way of putting yourself in the wildcat's den before you realize what you 're doing!" Page refused to answer his smile, and he went on gravely: "It scares me to think what might have happened Wednesday. Please don't wander off alone, Pagie. Let me go with you."

"I 've told you I don't want you, Harrison," was the curt answer. "Why you want to follow me and spy on me—"

Harrison flushed. "That is n't fair, Page; and you know it."

"Of course not!" Page said impatiently. "I beg your pardon. You make me say horrid things that I don't mean. You do worry me so, tagging after me!"

"Promise you 'll not go out of hearing, Page," said Harrison. "You ought not—you know you ought not—to go off in the woods alone."

"It is n't alone, if you must know, Mr. Meddlesome Matty!" she answered tartly, but lowering her voice so it would not reach the Harvies. "It 's a secret, and you are not to tell. Jimps Farlan is going with me."

"Jimps Farlan! Why, Page! You—"

"Yes; Jimps Farlan. You need n't be so surprised and scornful. He came to my help when no one else was bothering about me. He is just a little mountaineer—as you were, Harrison Ruffin, when we first knew you; and why *you* should object to my making friends with mountaineers— If we had n't happened to meet you, and father found out about your father—"

"That 'll do, thank you, Page," Harrison interrupted, flushing with amazement and anger. "I assure you I realize everything. I am grateful to you and Cousin Dabney—"

Page rushed back and threw her arms around her cousin, putting her cheek against

his lips to stop what he was saying. "Oh, that sounded horrid! I didn't mean it that way at all; indeed I didn't, dear Harrison, you worrying, troublesome, precious old darling! Now run along back and let me alone, for I 'm going. There can't be any harm in it, or any danger."

"O Page! You don't know where there 's harm and danger. You don't know these mountaineers. I do; and—well, I 'm afraid for you. If instead of stumbling on father, the night you were lost, you had met Rannell Gooch—do you know he killed a peddler for his pack of goods? And you had your rings and watch. Or if you had straggled on the other side of Bent Mountain into Rocky Hollow, where that desperate villain Bill Poole lives— O Page! Most of our mountain people are good, honest, upright, kind, the best folks in the world; but there are some mean, lawless riffraff in the mountain coves. The worst are these Pooles and Farlans; they 've had a feud for years, and they 're all ready with knives and shot-guns. If any little thing made the quarrel break out afresh, and a Poole met

Jimps Farlan, he would n't hesitate to shoot because you were in gun-range."

"Harrison! All you say may be—oh! of course it is—true, but it has nothing to do with me. I am not going 'way off in unknown places, among Gooches and feuds and things. I 'm only going with Jimps Farlan along Falling Water, a stream we 've picnicked on dozens of times. He 's going to show me—something he 'll not let any one else see." She started as the clear summoning whistle came again. "I 'm gone. Good-by!"

For a moment Harrison stood, undecided whether to return to the spring or to follow Page in spite of her protests; then, frowning, he went slowly back to Squirrel Spring.

Page, meanwhile, hurried through the woods in the direction of the summoning whistle. Presently she saw Jimps, lying flat on the ground, with his arms stretched out as if to draw all the woodland into their circle. Two or three juncos were on the ground near him, and a wren on an azalea-bush beside him was chirruping as if he were another bird or no more alien than the flowers and trees. The

birds flew away when Page approached, but Jimps did not move; he only looked up, giving her a strange feeling as if he were at once very near and very far away. It must be his eyes, she decided, those queer light, bright eyes, as lucid and impenetrable as a deep, clear lake or the illimitable depths of the sky.

There was a moment's silence, and Page felt as if Jimps were drifting away far and farther. She spoke abruptly, with a vague feeling that words would drag him back. "I 'm here," she said.

He gave a little sigh and sat up.

"How did you come?" asked Page.

He made a careless gesture. " 'Cross the mountain. It 's nighest."

"Don't you ever follow paths?" Page wanted to know.

"Uh, yes! An' I makes 'em."

"It must have been people like you that crossed these mountains first," said Page; "outdoorsy people that loved to roam in wild places. But they followed roads, the history books say,—roads our highways and railroads follow now,—that the buffaloes made."

"Buff'loes?" repeated Jimps. " 'S them a kind o' Injuns?"

"Oh, no! The Indians followed the buffalo roads, too. Buffaloes are huge beasts. There used to be millions and millions of them. Now there aren't any here in the East, and only a few herds in Western parks."

"I bet I 've seen 'em—gre't big things that keep outen the way o' folks. I 've seen 'em on 'Way-High Mountain. They 've got gre't big horns, ain't they?"

Page tried to remember pictures of buffaloes. "I don't think they have horns—yes, they have—oh, I don't know! I know how they look till I try to remember exactly, and then they get hazy. But I 've studied about them. They used to roam in huge herds from one feeding-ground to another, following the same route year after year. Sometimes a great herd would get frightened and stampede, and their thousands of rushing hoofs sounded like thunder and made the earth quake."

"Whew! I 'd like to see 'em," said Jimps. "Tell some more."

"I—I don't remember any more. You

learn lots of things at school—and forget them,'' confessed Page. ''Jimps, did you ever go to school?''

He shook his head. ''An' I ain't nuver goin' to,'' he said serenely.

Talking, laughing, or silent, they went on through the woods. Sometimes they ran merry races along the open glades; sometimes they played hide-and-seek in the tangled forest. Page did not quite like this game; for whenever Jimps was out of sight she had an uneasy feeling that he might never reappear. She liked better to go on with him, though she had to take the pace he set—flitting along like a glancing sunbeam, loitering like a shadow, or stopping to look at an odd tree, a bird, or an insect that she would never have seen if he had not pointed it out.

''Why, here we are at Butterfly Flat, right at the Sibolds'!'' Page exclaimed presently.

In front of them was a little glade at the nearer end of which was the Sibolds' home, a small whitewashed shanty. There were two or three dwelling-rooms, and a shed where Mr. Sibold kept a tiny shop and sold oil, meat,

shoes, coarse cloth, matches, tobacco, and ammunition. He kept, too, a post-office and distributed the occasional letters and papers that the mail rider left. There was a homely neatness about the rough little dwelling. Zinnias and marigolds beside the walk grew in prim lines, and the hops and morning-glories beside the porch were trained on strings in diamond-shaped patterns.

Page stood still and looked at the house.

"I 'm coming here to stay a while when we break camp next week," she said. "Harrison is taking a hike, and he 's to come back and go home with me. Mr. Sibold 's going to put up a hammock. And Mrs. Sibold makes the best doughnuts!— Jimps!" she called the boy, who was going on without waiting for her. "Jimps! do you see anybody? They 'll stop us, and talk and talk, and they 'll ask where I 'm going. Pshaw! I don't want to go by there."

"The path goes 'cross the flat," said Jimps; "but we c'n skirmish a way through the brush. You c'n have yore ruthers."

"Oh, the brush every time!" cried Page.

Jimps led her through the tangled edge of

the forest and came out on the lower end of Butterfly Flat. It was a grassy, level space between Deer and 'Way-High mountains, where Falling Water paused in its headlong course and went gently, murmuring like a drowsy child. The flat was overlaid with bergamot and daisies and milkweeds; above it blue and yellow butterflies fluttered and poised, and at every step grasshoppers rose in whirring, radiating lines.

"Now Sibolds can't see us," said Jimps. "I like this here place."

"Oh! it is lovely, lovely!" said Page, drawing in long breaths of the sweet, fresh air, as if she were taking in with it the beauty of the little valley.

Jimps dropped down on the ground and ran his fingers tenderly through the blades of grass. Then he laughed, starting like a bird-note and going into ripples like the merry little stream.

"What are you laughing at?" asked Page.

"Nothin'," he answered. "This here place al'ays makes me laugh with it."

The smile froze on his lips. He sprang up,

pale and trembling, with a shivering cry. As Page looked at him her own face blanched. He was terrified—at what? Before she could question, almost before she could wonder, Jimps's face cleared.

"'T ain't a rattler," he said. "Hit 's a dry-fly." But he had lost his desire to loiter. "Come on," he said.

They went on down the gorge. You might have looked twice without seeing the path they followed beside the stream. Higher on the bluff was a sawmill road, a mere shelf on the mountain-side. This followed the left side of Falling Water up from a little settlement on Woods River, called Manson; crossed the stream at Butterfly Flat; turned eastward into the forest; and finally joined the main road that led to West Virginia.

There was another road from Butterfly Flat. It took a westerly direction down the gap between Deer and Gap mountains; circled mountain-spurs; and meandered down to the river, where there was a ferry-boat crossing to New Canaan, the county town. Thence a road led up Woods River to Manson.

Roughly speaking, the Falling Water road from Butterfly Flat to Manson was like the straight side of the letter D and the gap route was like the rounded side. These are roads we must remember, for we shall travel them more than once, sometimes in dire need and hot haste.

Page and Jimps went down Falling Water till they came to Rocky Hollow, a narrow valley on the right. Rocky Run flowed for two or three miles almost parallel with Falling Water, from which the steep rugged ridge of 'Way-High Mountain separated it. Here, just above Crystal Falls, the mountain ended in a bluff, and Rocky Run joined Falling Water.

"I 've seen them critters, buff'loes you call 'em, go up this here hollow on the clifft side o' 'Way-High," said Jimps.

"Let 's go up the hollow, and perhaps we 'll see them," suggested Page.

"Ump-m'm!" Jimps made a dissenting murmur. "Mean folks live thar."

"We 've seen one cabin; about half a mile up-stream, it seems to be. We saw it from Deer Mountain," said Page.

"That 's old Shearam's. He 's a mean man. He 's meaner 'n the Pooles. They live —old Bill an' Marthy—higher up that hollow, an' they 're the meanest folks in the world. Ef Bill see me nigh his house, he 'd lief shoot me."

"Oh! Why?" exclaimed Page.

"My folks an' his don't git on so good. He got the drap on pappy."

"The drap on him?" Page did not understand.

"Um-h'm. He 's got a mighty straight-shootin' gun. But I 'll plant him some day."

"Jimps! Do you mean he killed your father? How awful! But that 's a thing for the law to punish, not for you. It 's wicked—awfully, terribly wrong—to kill people."

"Not Pooles," said Jimps. "Look whar you step. You hurt that flower." He gently straightened the stem of the yellow-fringed orchis that she had bent.

The flower and the place they were approaching reminded Page of an adventure that turned her thoughts from Jimps's affairs and made her shudder.

"I came near breaking my neck here at Crystal Falls," she said.

"It 's sure a pretty place," said Jimps calmly; he seldom troubled himself to question or to sympathize with others. "That water looks like it 's alive. It hits them rocks now," he said, looking at the stream that plunged from a ledge, struck some shelving rocks, and went, broken and foaming, into a deep pool. "But flood-times it makes a clean jump. Uh, then it 's a sight!"

Page followed him to the pool-side, and they stood looking up at the glittering shaft of the upper waterfall and at the ledge of sandstone, fringed with rhododendrons and hemlocks, that semicircled on the right and overhung a bare wall of shale. A little farther downstream the wall rose steep and straight, but with vines and shrubs in its cracks and crevices. Page's eyes were fixed on the shelving rock beside the falls.

"And I—I tried to climb up there," she said, shuddering.

"Thar 's whar we 're goin' now," Jimps said, pointing to the overhanging ledge.

"No!" cried Page. "Oh, I would n't try it again, not for the world! I got half-way up. It makes my knees feel like water just to think of going up that steep, slippery, rotten rock."

"I go up thar," said Jimps. "That 's whar my sparklers is."

"Up there!" gasped Page. "You really climb that wall?"

"Sure. Come on."

"No! no! no!" cried Page. "If you can—I don't see how it 's possible—oh! I never could."

"It 's like goin' up steps, onct you know the way," said Jimps. "Thar 's jest one place. Cross yore heart an' sw'ar, Injun true, not to tell, an' I 'll show it to you."

"Oh! I 'll promise. I 'd like to see the place. But I 'm not going to try to climb up there; not ever again!"

She followed Jimps across the stream to the foot of the wall.

"See here!" he said.

He put his foot on a projecting rock, caught hold of a rhododendron branch, stepped into a crevice, and pulled himself up by a hemlock root.

"Oh! I can do that," said Page. "But I 'm not going any farther."

"It 's jest as easy up here," Jimps said, following a narrow ledge along the sheer cliff till he came to a crevice where rocks and roots offered foothold and handhold. "Don't be afeared an' it 's safe. Put yore foot whar my foot goes. Don't trusten yore weight to rock or root till you know it 's steady."

As he showed the way, it seemed so safe and easy that Page followed him. They passed the clinging or trailing verdure, and came out on a ledge. From below, indeed, this ledge seemed the top of the cliff; on it grew the rhododendrons and hemlocks they had seen from below; but in front of them there was a higher, overhanging ledge. They followed the shelf they were on until it broadened and sloped inward, making a little nook under the upper rock. Jimps stopped and pointed an eager finger at the nook.

"Thar 's my sparklers!"

"Oh! oh! o-oh!" Page exclaimed with wonder and delight.

Never in her life had she seen such lovely

mosses. They covered the bottom and the sides of the nook, and even the under surface of the overhanging ledge, where they looked like a little upside-down forest. But Page saw them merely as a verdant background for a galaxy of radiant, brilliant gems. The moisture that trickled down the cliff and came in spray from the waterfall hung in drops and droplets on an exquisite moss with thin translucent leaves, like tiny plates of green copper. The sunshine transformed each globule on each leaflet into a glittering jewel—diamond, topaz, emerald, ruby, sapphire.

"That blue one 's the prettiest thing I ever saw," said Page.

"Look at that big green one," said Jimps. "An' thar 's one redder 'n fire."

"O-oh! that one 's fairly blazing with all colors, like a diamond. See those precious yellow ones back there, that look as if they were remembering the sunlight. Oh! they are *all* the loveliest things that ever were! How on earth did you find them, 'way up here?"

"I come on 'em one day I was roamin' 'long the clifft," said Jimps. "I brung Grief up

here—uh, it was a push an' a pull an' a tote! —an' he laughed an' grabbed them drops, lookin' so surprised when he opened his hand an' nothin' thar but wet!"

Page laughed. "I can just see him," she said, "as amazed not to get his jewels as Mrs. Candler was to get hers. O Jimps! let 's call this the Jewel-Box, and let 's keep it for our hidden treasure. We 'll never tell where it is."

"I got no notion o' tellin'," said Jimps.

For a while they amused themselves by pointing out to each other the prettiest drops, and stirring the moss gently to make them glitter.

Then Jimps said, "You like this so good, maybe—I dunno. Well, I reckon it 's time to go."

"Go!" With a shudder, Page looked down at the stream rushing along its rocky bed a hundred feet below. "I—I forgot we had to go back. Oh! how can we? I can't ever climb down there!"

"Uh! that ain't hard," Jimps said carelessly. "But it 's nigher to go up-stream. This-a-way."

He went ahead and showed the way. The ledge they were on broke off at the upper end of the nook, but they easily mounted on the rough rock to the ledge above. This broadened and sloped downward to the top of the waterfall, quite concealing the nook on the lower ledge.

"Oh!" exclaimed Page, looking back. "There is n't a sign of the Jewel-Box! It 's hidden and safe, perfectly safe. No one would dream anybody ever could climb that rock wall. It 's a beautiful secret. And it 's the loveliest place I know."

Jimps did not answer at once. He splashed through Falling Water, and Page crossed behind him on the stones, and they went back to the path they had followed down-stream. At last he spoke:

"I know a place that 's lots prettier."

"Where?" asked Page. "I don't believe it 's prettier than this. It can't be. Where is it, Jimps?"

"Uh! it 's not so nigh an' it 's not so fur," he said vaguely. "An' it 's fine an' ill-convenient to git to."

"Jimps! Please show it to me. You will, won't you?" coaxed Page.

He shook his head, but when they came to the foot-bridge at Butterfly Flat, he paused a moment and then said, "Come this-a-way."

CHAPTER IV

JIMPS went about a mile up the left bank of the stream; then he stopped and, looking sideways at Page, said slowly: "That place is nigh, mighty nigh, here."

"Pshaw!" She was disappointed. "I 've been here before. I don't think it 's so pretty; it can't compare with the Jewel-Box."

"H'm!" said Jimps. "You ain't nuver see that place, not ef you been by it a hunderd times. It 's right here."

"Here?" Page looked at the broken stones overgrown with wild raspberries and stinging-nettles. "You call this pretty?"

Jimps answered only with a grimace. He took a dozen steps upward on the ragged stones, seized a rhododendron root, dangled in the air, swung around a projecting corner of a great stone, and—disappeared. A second later his impish face grinned back at Page.

"That 's the only way to git here," he said.

Page caught the root—and released it. Suppose she should fall?

Jimps laughed mockingly.

She grasped the root again, bit her lips and shut her eyes, and, swinging dizzily out over space, alighted at Jimps's side.

Was there ever a lovelier spot? The loose rocks made a semicircular wall, with thick-growing chestnut woods at the top, inclosing a dell about fifty feet long and half as wide. In the center there was an open space across which lay the trunk of a giant hemlock; behind it stood its great moss-covered stump. The place was carpeted with hemlock needles, brown and soft and fragrant. Here and there was a splotch of gray or pale-green moss, or of dark-green partridge-berry set with scarlet globules.

The sunlight that flickered through the hemlock boughs was subdued, as if the trees had sighed some message that quieted its mirth. But on the southern side of the dell the rocks dropped down to Falling Water—so near that its ripplings and tinklings mingled with the swishing of the hemlocks—and the sunlit tops

of the birches beside the stream made a radiant rim for the dell.

Page was in an ecstasy of delight. "How lovely it is! how sweet it is! how soft it is! how musical it is!" she exclaimed. "Oh, I didn't know a place could look and feel and sound like this!"

"The path ain't ten foot away from here, down them rocks," said Jimps.

"How did you ever find it, shut in and locked up so?"

"I followed a squirrel in here last summer," Jimps answered. "I 've been comin' here right along since then. Now you set down under them thick bushes"—he pointed to a clump of rhododendrons—"an' don't you move or wink or say a word. An' you 'll see —what you see."

Page crept under the bushes and sat down on the leaf-carpeted ground, and looked out at Jimps.

In his dingy clothes and with his shaggy locks and wild, free face, he seemed as much a part of the place as the hemlocks and the birch-trees. He stood very still for a while—

so still that one of the copper-colored butterflies drifting about and pausing in the sunshine alighted on him as unaffrighted as on the mossy log.

Moving as lightly as a bit of thistledown, Jimps flitted to the hemlock stump. He raised his face, and a wandering sunbeam found and brightened it—or was reflected from it, for that shining, expectant look seemed rather an inner radiance than an outside thing.

Page held her breath, waiting for—she knew not what. Presently she heard a sound that seemed the very voice of the sun-soaked, hemlock-scented dell. It did not seem as if Jimps spoke; it was rather as if the notes came of themselves, as if he were the spirit of the wild, beautiful place.

Jimps paused.

There was an answering note, high-pitched and chirping. Down the rocky, wooded hillside came a chipmunk whose comical cheek-pouches were stuffed with berries and seeds. It came down the rocks with little hesitant runs and pauses; stopped at the edge of the dell and sat there, with its tail undulating and

its bright eyes sparkling. Presently, with a rapid, throaty *chuck! chuck!* it scurried to the stump, cocked its head on one side, and looked up at Jimps.

Just then a slim gray body hurled itself from a chestnut-tree and alighted on the boy's arm. It was a gray squirrel, whose mate followed more sedately across the glade, with two baby squirrels. They clambered up the stump, and Jimps lifted the young ones to his shoulder. The mother ran up his leg and cuddled against his neck.

Two rusty-red squirrels, about the size of the baby grays, came scurrying down a hemlock near Page. They were impudent, voluble fellows, those "mountain boomers." They stopped midway down the tree, to sputter and bark and scold at Page. Then they cocked their heads to listen to the coaxing call, and answered it with musical churring notes, a real woodland song.

Down the rocky hillside came a rust-colored fox-squirrel nearly twice as large as the full-grown gray squirrels. It moved slowly, with an awkward waddle very unlike the agile grace

of its smaller cousins, and stopped at the foot of the stump.

An appealing chirping sound, like a young bird's call to its mother, threaded its way through Jimps's melody. There came in response the *peenk! peenk!* of downy woodpeckers, the sharp *tsip! tsip!* of juncos, the musical *tcheer!* of goldfinches, the soft coo of mourning-doves. They fluttered to near-by branches, and two or three of the boldest alighted on Jimps's outstretched hands.

He stood among his furred and feathered friends, unmindful of Page and forgetful of himself. He swayed lightly to and fro on the moss-covered stump, as if the breeze that was waving the hemlocks were having its will with him. His notes entwined with and disentangled from those of the birds.

And then there came a flutelike note—sweet, sad, happy, wistful—pure and clear as if it came from the opened gates of heaven; it was the song of the wood-thrush at a little distance, repeated and echoed by the boy.

Tears were dripping down Page's cheeks. Her heart ached with exquisite joy and sorrow.

Page sat there, watching him

She felt a new and dear nearness to everything—sunshine, grass, trees, birds, beasts, every little leaf and chirping insect; she was neighbor and kin to them all. But Jimps—ah! Jimps was more than neighbor and kin; he was a part of the wild, beautiful woodland; his voice was its very soul and spirit. How wonderful, and how natural!

She gazed at him, standing there on tiptoe as if poised for flight with the wood-thrush. And then, with a start, she gazed beyond him at a huge brown head thrust through the chestnut foliage. A body followed leisurely—a great beast towering up on slim legs and crowned with magnificent, wide-branching antlers. The creature glanced at Jimps and accepted him as a part of the place, like the hemlocks and the squirrels. Browsing on the tender foliage, it advanced straight toward Page. She sprang up and shrieked.

That shriek was like a stone falling into a clear pool and destroying its mirrored beauty; like a cry of "Fire!" or "Murder!" breaking a happy dream; like a knife separating body and soul. As it was felt in the air—it seemed

as if there were not time for it to be heard—Jimps answered it with a startled cry.

For a second Page did not look at him. She saw that great beast crash through the bushes and speed away. She saw the birds whirr off, as if frightened by a hovering hawk; the gray squirrels run up the nearest hemlock, with their young ones in their mouths; the chipmunk dash off, uttering little churring whistles of alarm; the red squirrels, sputtering angrily, leap into tree-tops; the fox-squirrel bound toward its den.

And then, while her shriek and his scream were still quavering in the air, Page looked at Jimps. He started violently, as if he were about to dash away with the other wildwood creatures; then he gave a convulsive shudder and a dazed, helpless look came over his face. He shivered and seemed to shrink away, to collapse before her very eyes, like a soaring gay little balloon that is punctured and flutters to the ground, shriveled and ugly. No, not like that trivial mishap; this was a piteous catastrophe, the collapse of a living creature, and not of the body merely, but of the spirit.

"O Jimps!" exclaimed Page.

He did not answer. His head dropped on his chest and his hands fell heavily to his sides. He gave a stumbling step and sank on the ground.

Page was terrified.

"Jimps! Jimps!" she sobbed. "What is the matter? Oh! what is the matter?"

She dropped down beside him and put her hand on his arm. He gave a shiver, like a broken-winged bird knowing itself powerless to escape from its captor.

"Oh! what did I do?" cried Page.

Jimps looked at her with an expressionless stare. Then he got slowly and clumsily to his feet, and, with his head hung down, stood fumbling with his hands.

"I—oh! I did n't mean to say anything," Page cried in a broken voice. "But when I saw that huge beast coming—it was coming straight toward me—oh! I was so frightened. Then I heard that cry and knew I had screamed."

"I had n't ought to brung you here," Jimps said dully. He took one or two uncertain

steps. "They don't like folks. I been all this time a-learnin' 'em to friend with me." He did not seem to hear Page's protestations of grief and contrition. "Let 's—let 's rest a while," he said.

He dropped down like a clod, and in a minute he was breathing like one in a heavy stupor. Page stood gazing at him, with a troubled frown.

Had she driven his woodland friends away forever? Had she destroyed evermore the sweet fellowship like that of the Golden Age? Or was it all a dream, a fancy, a thing that had never been and could never be? Surely this dirty, snoring boy could never create or share such marvels!

All at once she felt terribly frightened and alone, here with this sleeping vagabond in the wild, unfriendly woods. Suppose one of the Pooles should come? Or Rannell Gooch? She looked around with scared eyes, and gave a little cry when a dead bough creaked in the wind.

Jimps stirred. He opened his eyes, stretched his arms, and sighed. Then he stood up and

said in his slow, sweet voice, a little lower and sadder than usual: "You done skeered 'em off. Come on away."

Without one glance around he left the magic dell, and Page followed him.

"I am sorry, so sorry, I screamed and frightened the things," she said penitently; "but I could n't help it."

Jimps did not answer.

Presently Page again broke the dull, unfriendly silence. "That huge beast terrified me. What was it, Jimps?" she asked timidly.

"One o' them buff'loes, I reckon."

"Oh, no! There are n't any buffaloes in these mountains," she said. "Oh! I believe it was an elk. Father helped bring some elks here from the West a few years ago. He said they were like our Virginia deer, but larger and with huge antlers. That 's what it was—an elk. Don't you reckon it was?"

"Maybe so," Jimps said in a flat, uninterested tone.

Instead of turning toward Butterfly Flat, he went slowly up-stream.

"Where are you going?" Page asked pres-

ently. "I ought to be getting back to Squirrel Spring to the others."

"I 'm goin' short-cut way."

He plodded along without raising his eyes, and for several minutes Page followed him in silence. Then they came to a huddle of broken rocks. A little stream was trickling down the hollow, and Page, following its course with her eyes, saw through the bushes an open space on the mountain-side. There was a large covered iron kettle, with a pipe running from it to a barrel near by.

"Is n't that queer!" she exclaimed. "There 's a big pot over there by that shelving rock. What are people doing, cooking out here, do you suppose?"

Jimps looked up quickly, sprang back, and caught her by the wrist to draw her away.

But it was too late. The rhododendron-bushes above them parted and disclosed a mountaineer.

"Halt thar!" he said, looking along the barrel of his gun at the two intruders.

CHAPTER V

PAGE gave a shrill scream.

The man's finger was on the gun-trigger. He spoke quickly in a harsh undertone. "Shet yore mouth. Ef you yell ag'in, I 'll blow yore brains out."

Terrified into silence, Page stood staring at the desperado. He was a tall, thin, wiry old man, with sand-colored face and hair and with pale-blue eyes—merciless eyes that assured Page he would not hesitate to carry out his threat.

Jimps, after one quick glance at the mountain-side, had abruptly turned his face away. "What you want?" he asked in a low, cautious voice.

The man replied with another question: "What you doin' here?"

"Jest goin' up Fallin' Water," Jimps said. "We was down-stream. I was goin' to show her"—he jerked his head toward Page—"the

short-cut 'long Laurel Run to whar her folks is in the woods. We was sort o' hurryin' to git back 'fore they got uneasy an' started after her."

This seemingly careless speech produced an effect. A younger man, a heavy-set, red-faced fellow with a gun in his hand, came out of the bushes.

"Let 'em go on, Pappy," he said. "Make 'em sw'ar not to tell what they 've seen an' let 'em go on. We don't want a gang o' them hotel fools traipsin' here."

"Don't let us rush, don't let us rush," drawled the older man. "We git on quicker takin' things slow." He had not moved his eyes from Jimps and Page while he spoke to his companion, and now he asked sharply, "Do yore folks know which-a-way you come?"

"Yes," answered Jimps.

But in the same breath with that "Yes" Page was saying: "No; oh, no! They don't know where I am."

The doubt on the old man's face deepened into suspicion. "'Naw' an' 'Yes'! One o' you 's lyin', an' "—he looked at Jimps and then at

Page—" 't ain't the gal. You keep a shet mouth, boy, till I ax you to speak. What you doin' here?" he demanded of Page.

"Why—why—nothing," she stammered.

"What you come this way for?"

"We were just out walking."

"Walkin' whar? Whar was you goin'?"

"Just taking a walk to—to see pretty things along the stream. I was going back to Squirrel Spring."

"She 's lyin', too," the old man said in a slightly lowered voice, turning aside to consult with his companion, but keeping his eyes and his gun on the intruders.

"Cert'n'y she is," agreed the younger man.

To them walking meant necessarily a destination and an errand; it seemed incredible that any one should walk miles through the woods merely for the pleasure of it.

The younger man went on: "Them revenues done got mighty crafty, Pap. I reckon they sent this gal out to git evi*dence*, an' they 're aimin' to take us—jest as we 're ready to move our still."

"They ain't goin' to git me. The gal say—

an' she looks like it 's so— the folks don't know whar she is. We 'll fix the cubs so they won't tote no news." He fingered his gun and glanced at the wilderness of rocks where a body could be flung and lie concealed—until hovering buzzards guided the searchers.

The younger man demurred: "Naw, Pap; that won't do. A killin' makes too big a search. Folks would hunt the mountains for this gal, an' they 'd cross the line an' comb West Virginia to find us. I don't want to be mixed up in no useless killin's."

"I reckon you 're right, Sam—"

"Don't be callin' names," the other man interjected sharply.

"It do seem to hurt a young fellow's recommendations nowadays to do a killin'. I reckon you 're right. But what are we goin' to do with them brats?"

"S'pose they sw'ar"—began Sam, turning toward Page and Jimps.

"We will; oh, we will! We 'll promise never, never to tell about seeing you," Page exclaimed eagerly.

The old man laughed harshly. "Shucks!

What 's thar word worth? Ain't they told lies, both on 'em, with thar first breath? Naw, we can't let 'em go. Ef we don't shoot 'em—"

The man called "Sam" said something in an undertone. Even Jimps's alert ears could catch only occasional words—"hollow," "hour," "fasten." The man ended, raising his voice a little: "An' it 'll be a time 'fore folks find 'em thar. By then we won't be hereabouts. Bill's got the wheel 'most fixed, an' we c'n take our mountain-dew 'cross the line to-night."

"We-ell." The old man agreed reluctantly. "But it 's a heap more trouble."

"It 's the best way. The good old days is gone when it was safe to shoot anybody that bothered you," said Sam. Here a sudden thought came to him and made him pause. "That boy—turnin' 'way like he wanted to hide—seems like I 've seen him somewhar. Do you know him?"

The old man shook his head. "I don't know folks hereabouts. That 's huccome I moved to this neighborhood. Maybe Bill knows him."

The young fellow laughed gruffly. "Bill

knows too many folks hereabouts, an' they know him—the biggest old vilyan unhung! That 's why he keeps tinkerin' with the wagon an' leaves this part o' the job to us."

"What diff'rence do it make who the boy is?" the old man asked impatiently.

"I jest want to know ef he knows me."

"I b'lieve I 've seen you," said Jimps, looking at the man as if trying to recall something. "Ain't you Sam Woods, that come on Fallin' Water last year with a lumber camp?"

"That 's who I am; but don't you tell on me," the man said, with a relieved laugh. "You stay here, Pap, an' keep 'em covered with that good old gun o' your 'n whiles I speak to Bill. Then we 'll go an' fix the little devils. By then we git back, Bill 'll have the wagon ready, an' we 'll load so 's to move out at dark."

He turned back to the thicket, where the figure of a man was moving about. Page, gazing through the foliage, caught a glimpse of a face that made her shudder—it was so sullen and fierce. The features were lost in the tangled beard and long, grizzled hair. From under

dark, shaggy brows gleamed evil, malicious, little reddish eyes.

"O-oh! Jimps!" gasped Page. "Look at that awful man!"

But Jimps did not move. After one sharp glance into the thicket when they were held up, he had kept his back to the still.

After a muttered conversation with the man in the thicket, the fellow whom Jimps called Sam Woods came back.

"I 'll take the lead," he said. "I been thar an' I know the way."

"All right," said the old man. "The gal c'n come next an' then the boy. I 'll be behind with old squirrel-barker." He smiled and patted his gun.

They left the path beside the stream and followed a steep, rough trail up 'Way-High Mountain. Page went stumbling along, so miserable and frightened that she took no heed of her steps. Time and again she slipped and almost fell. Were these awful men driving her and Jimps to some more remote place to murder them? Perhaps that old villain was even now taking aim, was going to shoot. She

cowered, and then glanced back with terrified, questioning eyes.

The old man had his gun at the ready, but he was paying no attention to her, except to hurl an oath when she delayed him by stumbling. He was watching Jimps closely.

"Don't you break that limb," he said sharply as the boy caught a chestnut bough. "You broke one back thar. Don't you do that ag'in."

"Keep back yore shirt-sleeve from tearin' on them locusts," he ordered a minute later.

Presently the trail led along the top of a rock that sloped steeply down for fifty or sixty feet and ended in a thicket of locusts.

The old man uttered a fierce oath and thrust the muzzle of his gun against Jimps's head. "Ef you roll down that rock, I 'll shoot you 'fore you hit the bottom—an' the gal too."

"How you know what I was thinkin'?" blurted the boy.

Page was terrified, not only by the man's threat, but by the thought of being left alone with these desperate men.

"O Jimps!" she cried imploringly. "Don't leave me; oh, don't!"

"Look whar you goin', gal," the old man commanded fiercely as she slipped on a loose stone. "Stop thar a minute, Sam, an' harken to me. 'T won't do to shet the two o' them up together, like you was plannin'. This boy's slyer 'n a old red fox. He 'd git out any crack whar smoke could go. You wait a minute, an' I 'll fix him an' leave him here."

"We ain't got no rope to tie him," objected Sam, "or no ax to cut a hick'ry an' git withes."

"I don't need none. I 'm goin' to death-lock him."

"Death-lock him?"

"Yes. It 's a Injun trick," explained the old man. "My gran'pappy showed it to me. He seen it when he was a boy, in the corpse bones that Injuns left."

"What!" exclaimed Sam.

"Yes, suh! The Shawnees come on a settlement nigh whar he lived, an' massa*creed* some folks, an' carried off some, an' left some death-locked. Gran'pappy's folks did n't know 'bout it till next spring; thar wa'n't much passin' twixen settlements in winter. They found the folks thar by the trees—thar bones,

for the buzzards done picked off the meat—whar the Injuns put 'em. Uh, you don't git away from a death-lock! You stand here, Sam, with yore gun ready, an' ef the brats offer to move, blow out thar brains."

He laid down his gun. Then he caught Jimps in a grip of steel and pushed him against a sapling a little removed from other trees. Holding Jimps's shoulder with one hand, he bent down and, with a quick movement, pulled the boy's feet behind the tree and twisted one ankle under the other. Then he pushed Jimps to a sitting posture.

"Won't he wiggle himself loose or pull out with his hands?" asked Sam.

"'T ain't no way he c'n histe himself, squattin' thar cross-legged with his feet locked behinst that tree; his hands ain't no use to him," the old man answered, with a toothless grin of satisfaction. "Go on with the gal. The boy 'll stay thar till judgment-day ef we don't turn him loose."

"Hadn 't you better gag him?" asked Sam.

"Gag him? What fur? Bill says thar ain't been a track but his'n on this mountain for a

dozen year. We 'll be back in a hour or so. Let the cub yell his heart out. It 'll be sweet music to the buzzards." He gave an evil laugh. "Git on, you gal!"

"O Jimps! Jimps!— Don't leave him there. It 's all my fault. I asked him to come with me. Oh, do let him loose!" sobbed Page. "Please, please," she implored.

"You shet up; an' go on peart, or I 'll deathlock you to the next tree," said the old man, prodding her shoulder with the muzzle of his gun.

" 'T ain't no use to cry," said Jimps; "an' 't ain't no use to beg them devils. You jest worsenin' things. Go on an' leave me be."

His face was drawn with pain and was as pale as death, except for the blood trickling from his lips; he was biting them to keep back the groans to which he would not give way in the presence of his tormentors.

"O Jimps! Jimps!" Page cried, bursting into a desperate passion of tears.

"You git on," said the old man, "or I 'll—" He turned to his companion. " 'T ain't no sense in wastin' all this time with her."

Sam shook his head. "We can't go nowhar till Bill fixes that wagon," he said. "I nuver did like killin' gals. An' it 's safeter to have her whar they 'll hunt for her a long time. But, gal, you better not worry us too much," he said with ominous emphasis. "You better go on."

And Page went on: went on up the steep, rough trail, until she was so weary and spent that it seemed as if every panting breath, every faltering step, must be her last; went on along the rocky ridge of 'Way-High Mountain; went on down the rugged, lonely western slope, following a faint path through locust thickets, across rocks, through chestnut woods; went on till they came to Rocky Hollow and approached a cabin.

There was something peculiarly forlorn and gloomy and forbidding about the place. The clearing, overgrown with weeds, was without cultivated grain or vegetable or flower. The log cabin looked like a prison pen or the stronghold of robbers. It was small, and as securely built as a block-house erected by settlers in the Indian-infested wilderness. At

one end there was a rough rock chimney; on one side there were a stoutly shuttered window and a heavy door. The door was fastened by a padlock caught in the links of a chain passed through staples in the door and the door-frame.

"We ought to took that right-hand path," said Sam. "We was to go to the upper cabin; that 's what Bill said. It 's empty. He said for us to fasten 'em in thar. But that 's a good mile up the hollow, an' I don't see no use in wastin' time—"

"Like we 've been a-wastin' it," the old man interrupted grimly.

"Thar ain't nobody here c'n let her out," went on Sam. "Bill c'n do what he chooses with her when he gits home."

"The door 's locked," said the old man.

"I know whar the key is," replied Sam.

He went around the corner, returned with a key, and unlocked and opened the door of the cabin.

"Git in!" the old man said to Page.

"Oh, don't put me there! Don't put me in that awful place!" she exclaimed, shrinking back from the dungeon-like hole.

The old man caught her roughly by the shoulders and thrust her over the threshold. He kept his grip on her while he peered around.

"That shutter ain't jail-tight," he said. "We 'd better tie her hands. But what with? You can't see a thing in this midnight hole Here! This 'll do."

He jerked Page's handkerchief out of her blouse pocket, drew her arms behind her, and fastened her wrists together. Then again he peered about. The light from the open door shone on a string of red peppers hanging on a wooden peg on the wall.

"Thar's a stout peg," he said. "This'll fix her."

He unfastened Page's belt, wrapped it around her manacled arms, and then buckled it again and threw the loop over the forked peg.

While he was doing this he gave his companion a contemptuous side-glance. "She 'll stay here till Bill comes," he said, "and he 'll do what he chooses. *He* ain't no mush-hearted baby, Bill ain't. He's a cut-throatin' old gorilla, a rip-roarin' hell-hound, he is."

"You 're a hell-hound yoreself," grumbled Sam.

"Me! I 'm a lamb to Bill; I am that. Come on. Let 's git back to our job with that mountain-dew."

"Don't leave me here!" Page pleaded. "Oh, let me loose! I won't tell on you. I'll do anything you say. My father 'll pay you all the money he has. Please, please let me out!"

"Uh, Bill will settle with you," said the old man, turning away. "*He* ain't afeared. He 's cheated the hangman onct a'ready."

He went out. The door slammed. The chain rattled. The key screeched and grated as it turned in the rusty lock.

"Oh, let me out! let me out! Do let me out!" Page implored.

They would—they must—open the door and release her! They could not leave her in this black, suffocating, evil place. It was too cruel, too horrible.

"Shoot me—let me die in the sunshine—not —not smother—stifle—here," she gasped.

She held her breath to listen for an answer. Waiting with her heart in her ears, she heard

only retreating footsteps and harsh voices dying away in the distance.

Then she went wild with terror. She screamed at the top of her voice, pursuing her jailers with commands, reproaches, threats, pleas, that broke into frantic cries of rage, pain, fright, despair. She beat her head against the wall. She strained against her bonds until they cut into her wrists. She sobbed prayers. And, spent at last with the vehemence of her emotions, she stood still, too dazed and too weak to hold herself up, hanging limply on her bonds.

Dimly and by degrees, she made out one detail after another of her prison. It was a small square room. The walls were of logs with the bark left on them, and the cracks were closely chinked and daubed. A few rough boards were laid across the joists of the cabin, and a ladder in one corner led up to this loft. Where the timbers were cut out for the rude stairway, Page saw log rafters and a board roof.

The furniture of the cabin was of the simplest—a bed covered with a ragged patchwork

quilt; two chairs or stools made of hewn logs with sticks for legs; a table of the same rude construction, propped against the wall between the fireplace and the window.

These things Page made out faintly and with effort. The room was very dark. A little light dribbled down the chimney and lay in a dull patch on the ashes in the rough stone fireplace; one sunbeam came through a small knothole in the window-shutter and danced on the floor; a streak of light crept through a crevice under the door. These rays seemed only to intensify the murky darkness, which had a peculiarly loathsome quality, as if it were the embodiment of the cabin's squalor and foulness.

Penned in that place, Page was to await the coming of the man they called "Bill." And the merciless old man who wanted to shoot her, and who death-locked Jimps, had said he was a lamb compared to Bill; Bill was a "hell-hound," "a cut-throating gorilla." A gorilla! There flashed before her mind's eye the wild, fierce face she had glimpsed at the still, the malevolent eyes gleaming from bushy, grizzled

hair. That—that was Bill. Oh, no doubt of it! And a man like that would do—what evil thing would he not do?

The sunbeam, full of dancing golden motes, flickering through the knot-hole, caught her eyes and reminded her of Jimps. She had a swift vision of him as he stood tiptoe, with radiant face, rivaling with his sweet, clear note the melody of the wood-thrush; and then she saw him cruelly confined, with his face pale and distorted with agony and—

Suddenly there was a sharp, unearthly, horrible cry that seemed to come from all directions at once and to fill the room: "*Ee—ii—ii!*"

Page's heart gave a great leap and then stood still. What was that awful noise? Where did it come from? She stood rigid, holding her breath, her face drenched with the cold sweat of deathly terror—listening and listening.

But now she heard only the outdoor movements, the rustlings and chirpings and twitterings of the summer day. Yes! There was another sound: a little faint noise quite unlike and distinct from wind and insects and birds.

And it did not come from without. It was *inside* the cabin. She heard it again—a little rustling sound, like the slow, cautious movement of a living thing. It came from under the table, where there was a pile of dry grass and leaves and some rags.

Page gazed fearfully into the murky corner. The rubbish stirred—or perhaps her eyes had deceived her. No! She saw a slight but unmistakable movement. And now she heard not only that faint rustling but another sound—a subdued, irregular breathing. There was something alive, something that was watching her stealthily and intently.

Not a dog; no dog uttered that terrible cry. It was some wild creature—this place was remote and desolate enough for any beast to make it his lair—crouching there ready to leap.

Sick with terror, the cold sweat dripping from her face, she averted her head and shut her eyes. Poor thing! Fastened as she was, she could make no other self-protecting movement.

Several slow and dreadful minutes passed. Anything, anything would be better than this

awful suspense! She turned her head, opened her eyes, and gazed under the table.

At first she saw nothing but the pile of rubbish. Then it stirred. It rustled. There was a slow, hesitating movement. And then Page saw—she saw a face shining out from the gloom. Yes, shining! The beautiful, vague little face was so pale that it seemed to glow in the darkness with almost unearthly radiance. There were great, luminous eyes and waving pale-gold hair—or was it an aureole and the face itself a vision? Was it—could it be—real, a creature of flesh and blood?

"What—who are you?" faltered Page.

The face dropped down in the rubbish, and there was a scared, moaning cry.

"Oh! it is real—a child, poor little thing! I did n't mean to frighten you," said Page. "Come out here and let me see you. What is your name? Who shut you up here, and why?"

The child did not look up. It gave a low cry that reminded Page of the blood-curdling yell she had heard.

"Oh! that awful noise! It scared you too, did n't it?" she said, shuddering. "Dear, don't be afraid of me. I won't hurt you. I could n't if I wanted to. I 'm tied; I 'm tied fast. Come here and let 's see—"

She called and coaxed and pleaded, but the child would not budge from under the table, nor even raise its face from the rubbish-pile. Not until long after she gave up her efforts to make friends did it move again. Then it fixed its eyes upon Page with a wide, vacant stare, and after a while it crept from under the table.

Page saw now that it was a little fellow, painfully thin and pale, clad in a ragged blue cotton shirt. With slow, staggering movements and sidelong glances at her, the child went to an old bag in the middle of the room. He must have been sitting there and been frightened away by the coming of the men with Page, for there were his toys. Toys! He had two or three rough limestone crystals that he turned about so as to catch the faint light, and then pounded on the floor and beat together, laughing at the noise they made like a baby with a rattle.

After a while he stopped playing, and sat rocking himself back and forth, holding his head with both hands.

"Me hurt! hurt!" he whimpered over and over.

"What hurts, poor dear?" asked Page. "Is your head aching? Is—"

If she had screamed or struck at him, the child could not have scuttled away more quickly. He dug himself in the rubbish under the table, and the only signs that he heard Page's coaxing calls were his moans and the rustling of the grass and leaves under his quivering body. In trying to comfort him she forgot her own woes. It was heartbreaking to see him—a little, little child!—crouching there, shivering, so shy and frightened.

"You poor little dear! Don't be afraid of me. Oh, I 'm so sorry! If just I could get there and take you in my arms. Oh! won't you stop being scared, and look up and speak to me?"

At last she gave up. And then it was a long time before the child, muttering to himself, gained courage to come out. Glancing

timidly and furtively at Page and keeping as far as possible from her, he sidled to the door. He ran his little thin finger up and down, and down and up, along the chink of light under the door; then he clutched at the patch of sunshine that came through the knot-hole in the shutter.

Page would not persecute him by speaking to him again. And presently she forgot him in fearful thoughts about Jimps and herself. Poor, poor Jimps! She recalled the old man's tale, and lived it over for the boy. How the buzzards would sit in the trees and circle in the air, flapping their loathsome wings, waiting—waiting. Perhaps before life was gone, while he was still striving, with feeble cries and motions of his spent, tortured body, to ward off the carrion fowls, they, growing impatient, would swoop down and—and— She sickened at the scene her imagination conjured up, and closed her eyes as if to shut out a horrible reality.

And what would Bill—gorilla, cut-throat, hell-hound—do to her? Would he shoot her? Or would quick death be too merciful? Would

he shut her in that "other cabin" and leave her there to die? Would he death-lock her, or torture her in some other fiendish fashion?—that evil, awful man who was coming—was perhaps on his way—might arrive this minute, or the next.

She listened, terrified, to every sound. A bough snapped—she thought it was his footstep. Insects hummed, leaves rustled—she fancied them his approaching voice. It seemed incredible, as those slow and awful hours passed, incredible and impossible that the world outside was full of the beauty of a sunlit summer day, the rustling of breeze-stirred trees, the songs of birds, the buzz and murmur and chirp of happy insects.

The afternoon was waning now. The light no longer came dancing through the knot-hole. The sun had dropped behind the mountain, bringing an early twilight to the hollow and a deeper gloom to the dreary hovel. The child, huddled down on the old bag, had fallen asleep. His fair face and golden hair made a faint radiance in the darkness.

All Page's woes—the pain of her cramped

body, her terror, despair, harrowing suspense, torturing fancies—swept into a great wave of misery. Tears streamed down her cheeks. She wailed aloud. She wept with long, quivering sobs, as if her body and heart would dissolve in woe.

She did not notice the child, did not see that he had awakened and started to his feet. He was trembling violently, but he did not run to shelter. He stood there, quivering, with his staring eyes fixed on Page. Then, for the first time, he spoke: "Brat be good. Brat be good." He repeated the promise over and over.

Page, sobbing as if her heart would break, did not hear his soft, halting speech.

He stood still a while longer, gazing at her. Then he crept toward her. Presently she felt a little uncertain touch on her elbow. A faltering voice said, "Be good, girl! be good!"

She caught her breath on a sob, and looked through her tears down on the pale, lovely little face, quivering with her misery as if it were his own.

"O you darling!" she said.

When she spoke, the child went again to

his covert under the table. While she was trying to get him to come back to her, she heard— What was that noise outside? Was it a crackling twig, a rustling bough, an insect's chirping?—the sounds that had startled her so often before? Ah, no! She heard now stealthy footsteps and hushed voices; and caught a few words, low cautious words: "I 'll go in and get her."

Ah! Bill—the gorilla, the hell-hound, the cut-throat, the hangman's cheat—*Bill had come!*

CHAPTER VI

AFTER Page ran into the woods to meet Jimps Farlan, Harrison went back to Squirrel Spring. He and the Harvie boys cleaned it out, walled it in, and roofed it with a large, flat stone; they deepened the channel and made a little pool for a watering-place for cattle. Then they dropped down in the shade to wait for Mrs. Harvie and the girls.

Harrison sat facing the hillside down which Page had gone. If only she would come tripping along, bringing a tale about a wonderful butterfly or bird or flower, one of the pretty trifles that were always exciting her enthusiasm—and herself back safe! He started up eagerly when he heard laughing voices. Perhaps Page had joined the other girls and they were all returning together. But she was not with Mrs. Harvie and Anne Lewis and Elinor Lane and Mary Watkins, who came straggling along with their hands full of plants.

"Did you think we were never coming back? And are you starving?" called Mrs. Harvie. "We didn't mean to stay so long. But we found such lovely flowers, and so many of them, and it was such slow work digging them up with the trowel."

"Especially this darling little swamp-azalea that we just had to have," said Mary. "Will you look at my hands! There are blisters under the mud."

"You girls sit down and rest. We 'll plant the flowers," said Chris. "Just tell us where to put them."

"Don't you want to wait till after lunch?" asked his mother.

"Oh, no!" said Chris. "Let 's finish the job, and then have eats and naps."

"Grass-of-Parnassus likes a wet place. Put this in the stream just below the spring, Harrison, and protect it with a rock," said Elinor.

"And this jewel-weed—plant that near the stream, too," said Mrs. Harvie.

"Where shall we put this red lily?" asked Mary. "What do you think, Pagie?—Why, where is Page?"

"Yes, where is she?" asked Elinor. "The place seemed sort of forlorn, but I thought it was because the sun had gone under a cloud."

"Page—I left her here helping you boys. Where is she?" asked Mrs. Harvie.

It was Christopher who answered: "Oh! Page set us all to work on her mussy old job, and then she trotted off."

"A long, long time ago," said Sandy.

"She ought not to have wandered off alone," said Mrs. Harvie "Think what happened the other day. Run and call her, Chris."

Christopher went in the direction that Page had taken, and they heard him hallooing: "Page! O Page! Pa-a-age!"

They had finished transplanting the flowers when he came back.

"I don't see or hear anything of her, Mother. If you 'll give me a dozen sandwiches—I 'm starving—I 'll go and search her up."

"We 'll eat our lunch—'prayer and provender hinder no man'—and then all you boys go and look for her," said Mrs. Harvie. "Have you any idea where she went?"

"No, Mother," answered Chris, not looking at Harrison, who had kept silent—troubled, but unwilling to betray Page's secret.

Sandy spoke: "Maybe Harrison knows. He went a little way with Page and was talking to her."

Mrs. Harvie turned to Harrison with a question in her eyes.

"I—I don't know exactly where they were going, Mrs. Harvie."

" 'They'?"

"I heard her say she was going along Falling Water with—with Jimps Farlan."

"And you let Page wander off alone with that boy that 's as wild and irresponsible as a squirrel or a fox!"

"I ought to have—have stopped her. But she wanted to go. And she felt sure Jimps could take care of her, after his saving her from that wildcat."

"But, Harrison! That 's no reason why she should go to-day, straying off with him, no one knows where. I am surprised at you—more surprised at you than at her. Page has a pell-mell way of going ahead on

the impulse of the minute. But I thought you had better judgment. Mr. Ruffin told me expressly that he asked you to watch out for her. And you let her go—"

"I am sorry, Mrs. Harvie. I am going to look for her right now."

Harrison looked so miserable that Chris, catching him by the arm, interposed: "Come, come, Mamsy dear! Don't be rough on old Harson. If he tried to stop Page— Maybe he did; I saw him talking to her, and from the way she tossed her chin I know he was arguing with her. But reasoning with Page when she 's set on doing a thing—whew! it 's like trying to stop a whirlwind with a fistful of thistledown. We 'll hike along and find her. Which way shall we go, Harrison?"

"To Falling Water," Harrison said. He did not know whether Page had gone up or down stream; she had merely said she was "going along Falling Water" and "look for her back when they saw her."

"Wait a minute. Let me give you some food," said Mrs. Harvie.

She opened the lunch-basket and filled the boys' hands and pockets with sandwiches.

"Now run along," she said. "But don't go very far or stay very long. The Sibolds probably saw Page and can tell you which way she went. If you don't find her soon, come back, and we 'll go to the hotel and start out a search-party. If she 's lost, that 's the thing to do. We 'll wait here for you. You know, she may come back two minutes after you are out of hearing."

"Perfectly furious with us for being uneasy about her. Silly thing! Aw! this is just like a girl—especially Page!" said Christopher.

David laughed, but Harrison did not. He was frankly uneasy.

"We 'll find her. We 've got to find her," he said.

The three boys went together to Butterfly Flat. The Sibolds could give them no tidings of Page, so they divided forces: David and Christopher were to go to Crystal Falls, and Harrison said that he would explore a mile or two up-stream, then take a short-cut path up Laurel Run, and rejoin the party at Squirrel Spring.

He hurried along the trail that Page and Jimps had followed, stopping now and then to call his cousin and listen for an answer. He found signs, broken twigs and trampled ferns, that showed the trail had been traveled recently; but on the grassy or stony leaf-strewn path it was impossible to distinguish footprints.

It was wild, rough country. On the left of Falling Water, the long, wooded slope of Gap Mountain ended at Butterfly Flat; below the flat rose the rugged heights of Deer Mountain, which were considered to be unscalable; only Jimps and Page knew the secret of the ascent to the "Jewel-Box." On the right of the stream, 'Way-High Mountain rose in a precipitous ridge between Falling Water and Rocky Run. To avoid its rocky spurs above the flat, Falling Water bent and twisted and curved, traveling three wild, rough miles to make a journey of less than an air-line mile.

Harrison passed the rock-bound dell without dreaming it was there, and a little farther up the stream he stopped abruptly.

A wisp of smoke was rising above the chest-

nut-trees. He knew there was no clearing or cabin near the place. What, then, was the meaning of that smoke? Picnickers or campers might be there, but more probably it was a still. Such a secluded spot on the stream was just the place a moonshiner would choose; and if it were a still, somewhere near it a keen-eyed mountaineer was probably on the lookout.

What if Page had come— But no! Even if she and Jimps Farlan had roamed up-stream, Jimps would keep her away from this place. If a still were here, he probably knew about it; such tidings travel quickly, in mysterious ways, in the lonely, remote mountains, as if the proverbial "little bird" did indeed carry the news. And, even if Jimps did not know about it, when he saw this smoke he would be on the alert and would lead Page away from the place.

Probably they had not come up-stream, anyway; there was nothing here to attract them. Perhaps Page was already on her way to Squirrel Spring with David and Christopher, and he had better get back there as quickly as

he could. But he could not cross the stream here where overhanging rocks barred the way. He looked around, and decided to climb the mountain-side, circle around the doubtful place, come back to the stream, and cross it some distance above the suspected still.

He climbed cautiously up the bluff, keeping under the shelter of bushes. Presently he came to a rough trail. He followed it a little way, thinking perhaps it led up-stream. But it did not; it climbed the mountain. He paused, undecided whether to retrace his steps and make the long elbow by Butterfly Flat, or to keep on scrambling along the mountain-side.

It was a still summer afternoon, and noises traveled far. Harrison heard the creaking of a broken bough, the whirring flight of quails, the tinkling trills and whistles of a Carolina wren, the cawing of crows, the chirping and buzzing of insects, the ripple of the stream, the swishing of a pine-tree—the usual sounds of a peaceful, happy woodland. And yet, the place was neither happy nor peaceful. There was a disturbing, distressing note—a calling voice, so far off and faint that it was drowned

by a bird's note or a cricket's chirp. It came again and again and again; and it troubled Harrison.

"I imagine—oh! all sorts of foolish things, because I 'm worried about Page," he said to himself. "That 's just some one calling a dog. Well, sure thing this path does n't lead back to Falling Water; it crosses the mountain. I 'd better hike back to Butterfly Flat. It 'll take less time than breaking a way upstream. And Mrs. Harvie 'll be expecting us back."

He turned and started down the mountain.

Now he no longer heard the calling voice; but he found himself listening for it. Instead of finding the silence a relief, he felt as if it were the despairing protest of some one he had deserted in dire need. It was—was n't it?—because he was troubled about Page that he took it that way, but— Well, he could n't stand it. He wheeled in his tracks. He would follow the path far enough to hear those cries more distinctly and to make out what they meant. It would not take long. There might really be some one in distress, some one

who had fallen and sprained an ankle or broken a leg.

He hurried along the rough upward trail, and presently he heard the cries again. With every step he took they became more distinct and more piteous and urgent. There were sharp yelps for aid, and then inarticulate screams of pain and despair, as of a trapped wild creature.

Presently Harrison heard some one thrashing about and clawing at stones and bushes. Then through the foliage he saw a boy crouching beside a sapling, making desperate, agonizing, vain efforts to get up. Why, this boy was Jimps Farlan, with whom Page had gone along Falling Water! Harrison sprang forward.

"Where 's Page? Where is she?" he cried.

"Turn me loose. Them men took her up the mountain. Turn me loose, for God's sake!"

"Who did it? What men?"

As Harrison questioned he was freeing Jimps, holding him up with the right hand and with the left releasing his twisted feet from

the tree. The boy was so cramped and tortured that when he tried to stand up, he fell in a crumpled heap on the ground.

"Where 's Page?" Harrison repeated urgingly.

"With them men." Jimps sat up and, frowning with pain, began to rub his legs.

"What 's happened? Tell me quick."

"They caught us," said Jimps. "She went in sight o' the still. They was aimin' to fasten us up somewhar. Then that old vilyan death-locked me, an' they took her on."

"On where? Where did they go with Page?"

"Straight up this trail. Wait! I can't go fast till I limber up," called Jimps.

Harrison, intent only on finding Page, hurried up the path without replying. Jimps followed. At first he limped along stiffly; but when his numb limbs regained their power he hurried on and overtook Harrison.

"Who were they, the men with Page?" asked Harrison.

"Boozer Sam Sawyer. An' a old man—Boozer called him 'Pappy.' I reckon he was

'Lijah Gooch. I heared he was moonshinin' on Fallin' Water, but I did n't know it was hereabouts. I cert'n'y wa'n't aimin' to run on that still. But I—I was sort o' dazed."

"You ought to have had more sense than to run a girl in on a still. Two men. Were they all?"

"All that come in the open. Thar was—was a man at the still."

They went on for a while in silence.

Then Jimps said: "Look-a-here! Ef we keep 'long this path we 're goin' to meet Pappy an' Boozer. They 're aimin' to git back an' move thar still to-night."

"We 've got to watch for them, and hide in the bushes," said Harrison, keeping his course.

"Um-h'm; ef we see 'em in time. They got mighty sharp eyes an' guns," said Jimps.

"We 've got to take the risk. We must find Page quick as we can."

"We won't find her a-tall ef Pappy gits a bead on us with that old squirrel-barker gun o' his'n," answered Jimps. "I 'm goin' 'cross the mountain. It 's nigher. This here trail snakes round to miss the clifft. I c'n hit

it on t' other side o' the mountain an' save time—an' my hide."

"You coward—thinking of yourself, your hide, instead of Page!"

Without answering, Jimps turned to the left.

In a minute or two Harrison paused.

"You say it 'll save time? it 's nearer?" he asked.

"Crows fly this-a-way."

"How about the cliff? Can we get up it?" called Harrison.

"I 'm going to. It 's like climbin' so many trees set atop each other. It 's a hard pull—for a coward!" Jimps called back, with a mocking laugh.

Harrison gritted his teeth and, turning from the path, followed Jimps.

Ah, such a climb as it was! Straight up the mountain-side, where probably no human foot had gone before. There were steep slopes of rotten shale that slid and crumbled; and if a climber fell he would never regain his footing, but would go crashing to the bottom of the cliff. There were tall rocks; and as one went

upward, clinging to shrubs and roots and finding toeholds in crevices here and there, he knew that at any minute a sheer rock or an overhanging ledge might block the way. And then? What then?

Time after time the boys came to what seemed the last wall of rock, and mounted it—only to reach a narrow ledge rimmed with shrubs and trees, beyond which rose another cliff fringed with stunted pines, promising again the summit that still eluded them.

Harrison was a sturdy sportsman, and he climbed with stout muscles and a good heart. But long before he attained the top of that grim wall he had really reached the end of his physical powers. Only the thought of Page's need enabled him to go on the difficult, desperate way.

But Jimps went upward, agile and unwearied, far ahead. Now and then he climbed a scrubby oak and looked down at Harrison pulling up sheer rocks or scrambling over perilous shale.

"Why n't you come on? You said you was in a hurry," he called.

"I 'm climbin'—like a man," Harrison panted. "I 'm no—monkey—or—mountain bobcat."

Jimps laughed and sprang from the bending tree to the cliff-side, and sped upward.

At last they came to the mountain-top, a stony ledge sparsely overgrown with stunted pines and scrubby oaks. They crossed the ridge and looked down into Rocky Hollow. In the narrow valley there were three or four widely separated clearings and cabins alongside a little stream.

"The path 's thar." Jimps pointed to the right. "An' that 's *them* comin' back. They 'll rip an' bile when they git to that tree—an' me not thar!"

Two figures, indistinctly visible through the trees, were moving across a rocky, unwooded expanse far below.

"Where 's Page? She 's not with them," Harrison said anxiously.

"They 're comin' the way from Bill Poole's. I reckon maybe they left her thar," said Jimps. "I 'm goin' down the mountain and hit the path t' other side of 'em."

They descended the bluff easily and quickly and, at a safe distance below the mountaineers, went back to the trail. They hurried along till they came near the clearing. Then Jimps paused.

"We 've got to go slow an' keerful," he said in a low voice. "Marthy Poole 's as quick on the trigger as Bill."

Harrison pushed ahead. "I 'm going to see if Page is there," he declared.

Jimps gripped his arm. "You won't be no use to her or yoreself with the top o' yore head blowed off," he said. "An' sure thing, you ain't goin' to give Pooles a invite to shoot me. You keep a shet mouth an' le' me lead, or I 'm goin' home."

"But I tell you—"

"Take yore ruthers."

Harrison was eager to dash ahead. But it would not do to let Jimps, whose help might be sorely needed, go away. So, angrily and impatiently, he yielded. Jimps left the trail and skulked through the woods. He paused behind a thicket of greenbrier and blackberry-vines at the edge of the clearing.

"Here on thar ain't nothin' to hide behind," he said. "I 'm goin' to fox 'long, pickin' berries."

Keeping his face turned away from the cabin, he stepped into the clearing, followed by Harrison. While they seemed to be busy picking blackberries, they kept their eyes fixed on the cabin. They strolled along, as if aimlessly, from one clump of berry-vines to another, but every move took them nearer the house. Jimps stopped at the corner between the window and the chimney.

"Looks like Pooles is away," he said in a cautious undertone. "But you dunno. Listen good. An' be ready to run ef a body comes out."

Harrison spoke in a low but less well modulated voice: "We 've got to find out if Page is inside. If she is—if I have to tear the cabin down with my hands, I 'll go in and get her."

"Sh-sh!" whispered Jimps. "Keep still."

He gave a queer, sweet whistle. If the Pooles heard and noticed it, they would think it was a bird-note. But Page would know the

call, and she would know that it came from him. He put his head against the log wall and listened. He did not hear a sound. He whistled again, and then gave a purring call like that he had used to the wildcats. There was a gasp inside the cabin.

"Who 's that?" asked a voice that was hoarse with sobbing.

"Anybody thar?" Jimps inquired.

"Yes; there 's—"

"Lawzee!" Jimps went around the corner of the cabin like a flash, and sped to the woods.

Harrison stood his ground.

"Page! Page!" he called, and held his breath to listen.

"Harrison! Dear Harrison! Oh, it 's you —you! Thank God, it 's you! Oh, get me out before that awful man comes back! Do hurry and get me out!"

"Who 's there inside?"

"A child—a little boy. Oh, get me out!"

"I will, I will," promised Harrison. Then he called: "Jimps! You Jimps Farlan! Come and help get Page out. It 's only a child there with her."

"Uh! jest that young un, that brat!"

Without waiting for Jimps, Harrison began to jerk at the heavy oaken door. It was securely padlocked, and it would take him hours to force it open with his Scout knife, the only tool he had. He tried the shutter, but it was firmly fastened on the inside. He turned to consult Jimps. The boy was clambering like a squirrel up the projecting logs at the corner of the house.

"What monkey-shines are you up to?" Harrison demanded angrily. "Come down and help get Page out."

Jimps paused and made an impish grimace. Crouched under the eaves of the cabin, he looked like a gargoyle representing a fantastic spirit of the mountains. Without a word, he crept along the logs and swung himself to the roof. He sat for an instant astride the roof-tree, grinning down at Harrison. Then he stepped on the top of the rough stone chimney, squatted on the edge, caught hold of the top-most rocks, and swung himself down. The last glimpse Harrison had of him was the wild grin that he carried as he went scuttling and

scrambling down the chimney, with arms spread and legs outstretched to retard his leap or fall—whichever it might be.

Jimps alighted in the fireplace, and stood on the hearth, looking like a very sooty Brownie. Two screams greeted him, a strange little gurgling cry and a shriek from Page.

"Oh! oh! Jimps!" she gasped. "It 's—it *is* you!" Then she said soothingly: "Don't be scared, you poor little dear. He won't hurt you.— It 's a child, a little child, shut up here," she explained.

Jimps stood still a minute, blinking and straining his eyes in the darkness. Then he went to the window, fumbled for the chain that held the shutter, unfastened it, and threw open the shutter. There was neither sash nor glass over the opening, and Harrison bounded into the room.

"Harrison! Harrison! Thank God, you 've found me!" exclaimed Page.

"Page! dear Page!"

"Come on out," said Jimps.

"I—I can't," Page gasped. "I 'm tied. Oh, please unfasten me! Quick, quick!"

Harrison unbuckled the belt and untied the handkerchief which had cruelly bruised and cut her wrists.

"O Page! you poor darling!" he said, putting his arm around her to steady her faltering steps as he led her to the window.

Meanwhile Jimps was looking at the child, who had retreated under the table. He pulled aside the rubbish, and, holding the little fellow by the shoulder, looked him over with curious eyes.

"Huh, young un! I ain't see you for a month o' Sundays," he remarked. "You grow back'ards an' git littler."

After a vain effort to wrest himself away, the child stood still, with his chin thrust out, his hands pressed to his brow, his vacant, dim-sighted blue eyes avoiding Jimps. What a pale, meager, scared, pitiful little creature he was!

"Lawzee! You 're a rotten sight!" Jimps commented, with no more concern for the child's weakness and terror than one wild-wood thing has for another. Then he knit his brows and looked puzzled. "It 's funny," he

said. "I didn't mind you-all was anyways 'like."

The child whimpered, and Jimps released him and gave him a little push with the toe of his bare foot. The child buried himself again in the rubbish, but Jimps again pulled it aside. The little fellow covered his eyes with his hands, to shut out the sight of the impish sooty face. Just then Harrison glanced around.

"Let that child alone, you spiteful scamp!" he said sharply.

Jimps laughed, shrugged his shoulders, and turned to Page.

"We 'd better git out o' here," he said. "Old Bill an' Marthy 'll come any minute."

"That 's so," said Harrison. "Page dear, I 'll go first. If you can climb on the window-sill, I 'll lift you out. Jimps 'll help you up, if your poor feet are too stiff to move. We must get away as quick as we can."

"Yes, yes! Before Bill comes. Hurry, Harrison; oh, hurry!" cried Page, staggering toward the window.

Harrison jumped out, reached up and caught her in his arms, and eased her to the ground.

Jimps stood in the window, poised to leap, and then sprang back into the room.

"I 'll chain the shutter an' go up the chimbly," he said. "It 'll set 'em guessin' how she got out."

"Help the child out first," said Page.

"Naw. We don't bother with that," said Jimps.

"Oh, he 's so little and miserable-looking! We must get him out," cried Page.

"We can't, Page; we can't take the Pooles' child with us," said Harrison. "Come on. We must hurry away before those men get here."

"But I can't bear to leave him, shut up in the dark, alone, a little child like that," said Page.

"You found him here," replied Jimps. "You got nothin' to do with him."

"It won't do the child any good for us to stay here till those men come back and shoot us," said Harrison.

"But, Harrison—" pleaded Page.

Jimps settled the matter by slamming and fastening the shutter. Then he scrambled up

the chimney and sprang on the house-top. Instead of climbing down the gable, he tripped along the roof. At the very edge, he made a leap, and, turning a somersault like a playful kitten, he landed on the ground.

"Hurry!" he cried. "Git away from here. You follow that trail down Rocky Run to Fallin' Water. It 's a nigh way to Butterfly Flat."

"Come, Page," Harrison said, hurrying down the trail beside the stream. "Walk behind me."

"Come on, Jimps," called Page.

But Jimps shook his head, with an impish light in his eyes.

"You go on," he said. "I 'll be 'long presen'ly."

Page would have waited for him, but Harrison caught her hand and drew her down the path.

"Indeed, Page, you must not, must not stay here," he said.

And so they went down Rocky Hollow, leaving Jimps behind at the cabin.

CHAPTER VII

AS fast as Page could go, she and Harrison went down Rocky Hollow and up Falling Water, hurrying across the miles that lay between them and Butterfly Flat. They drew long breaths of relief when they came in sight of the peaceful, pleasant glade. Ah! there was the Sibolds' shanty, seeming so safe, so shut in an orderly, law-abiding world. Mr. Sibold was sitting on the porch, enjoying his pipe and the late afternoon sunshine. He was a stout, slouching old man, with a mild, weather-beaten face, a shock of yellow-gray hair, and a long, grizzled beard.

Page ran up and caught his hands as if they were a life-buoy and she a drowning mariner.

"Oh, Mr. Sibold! Mr. Sibold!" she cried. "Don't let them get us!"

"Hey, now! What 's the matter?" inquired the old man.

As soon as the drift of her story was ap-

parent, he got up and went indoors, beckoning the young folks to follow him into the back room, where his wife was busy preparing supper.

"Not so loud, not so loud, my dear. I ain't deef," he said nervously. "Best not let them folks hear you, if any of 'em happen this way."

His soft blue eyes wandered from Page's to Harrison's face as, talking excitedly together, they told their story.

Mrs. Sibold, a plumper, less weather-beaten, feminine copy of her husband, set her pots and pans out of scorching danger and put a comforting arm around Page.

"You pore child!" she said soothingly. "Wa'n't it a pity you happened on that still? You pore, starved, tired little thing! You ain't had a bite to eat since breakfast, have you? Well, now, supper is ready. I 'll get out some doughnuts. Do you like huckleberry jam?"

"I 'm not h-hungry," said Page, her teeth chattering.

"You ain't cold?" asked Mrs. Sibold; "not this hot evening?"

"Yes. No. I 'm—I 'm cold and hot too," Page answered with a quivering little laugh.

"She 's all in; she 's had such an awful time," Harrison said. "She does need food. Do give her something, Mrs. Sibold."

"Yes, Page; get yoreself food-full," said Mr. Sibold. "A hearty meal is good medicine. You eat and rest, and then I 'll see you safe to your camp."

"That 's right, Jefsey." Mrs. Sibold nodded approvingly. "Mr. Dabney Ruffin has been a friend to us, setting up money for yore stock of goods, and it 's our duty to help his girl. But, Jefsey, don't you take no useless risks."

"I won't. You can trust me for that," promised Mr. Sibold.

"Come, Mr. Sibold, let 's catch those scoundrels," said Harrison. "Page can stay here with Mrs. Sibold. You take your gun and go with me to that still—"

"Lord save us, no!" ejaculated the old man.

"We can surprise them and catch them—'Hands up!' to them this time—and turn them over to the sheriff."

"Look here, young man! It 's the sheriff's business to do the county arresting," Mr. Sibold replied. "And I ain't going to take his job. I 'm a peaceable man and a postmaster. I 've got no business at that still."

"Indeed you ain't, Jefsey," said his wife.

"But, Mr. Sibold! If we can arrest and punish—"

"Ah! but they might do the arresting and the punishing," interrupted the canny old man. "Come, come! Supper 's ready and waiting. And Lotta ain't willing for me to go off without my supper. Are you, Lotta?"

"I am not, Jefsey," his wife said firmly. "It always makes you faint-like and real dauncy to go about on a empty stomach."

"If you won't try to arrest them—we could do it, I 'm sure—at least let 's go over there and find out who they are, so we can have the sheriff follow them up," urged Harrison.

Mr. Sibold shook his head. "Supper is ready, and my wife will be real put out if I don't set down and eat. Won't you, Lotta?"

"I certain'y will," Mrs. Sibold agreed emphatically.

The old man sat heavily down to the table.

"Lord bless us and preserve us! You talk about spying on those folks. Why, their dogs would nose us out and we 'd likely get shot."

"If you are afraid, just lend me your gun. I 'll go," Harrison said impetuously.

"Oh, no, no, Harrison!" cried Page, clinging to his arm.

"No," Mr. Sibold said placidly. "I ain't going to risk yore getting shot and losing my gun. You can report that gang to the sheriff to-morrow, if you 're a mind to. But you need n't mention my name. I don't know anything first-hand."

"To-morrow they 'll be gone; they 're going to West Virginia to-night."

"So much the better. Let 'em go to West Virginia, and let West Virginia look out for 'em. We ain't got no grievance 'gainst 'em. They did n't aim to hurt you, Page. You put yoreself in their way, and they just shut you up."

"Think how they treated Jimps!" Page said indignantly.

"Oh, well! He 's just one of the Farlans.

They 're trifling, low-down folks, no better 'n the Pooles," said Mr. Sibold. "Them two gangs are always in scrimmages. We 've got no call to bother about that cub. Have a dish of kraut, Page. You need to eat to keep up yore strength."

Page shook her head impatiently. "And that poor little fellow in the cabin!" she cried. "Oh, I don't see how people can treat their child so!"

"That ain't Pooles' child," said Mrs. Sibold. "Bill and Marthy brung it from the porehouse some six or seven years ago. Marthy broke her leg the winter Bill was down with rheumatiz, and the county had them hauled to the porehouse. This child was there, and Marthy took a liking to it and brought it home with her."

" 'Took a liking to!' Why, he 's the most miserable, pitiful-looking little thing I ever saw!" exclaimed Page. "Those awful people ought not to be allowed to keep him."

"Well, well!" Mrs. Sibold palliated the matter. "It didn't belong to anybody. Its mother had gone off and left it. There were so many squalling brats at the porehouse, the

overseer said he could n't keep them kicked from underfoot. Nobody worried about Pooles taking that one. They say Marthy and Bill were right good to it at first; but it took to trying to run away, and now they keep it shut up in the cabin."

Mr. Sibold pushed back his plate and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

"I reckon we 'd better hustle along," he said. "We 'll sneak up the hollow and across Gap. The Lord defend us from Bill Poole!"

Three-quarters of an hour later Page and Harrison arrived safely at camp, to the great relief of their friends. The picnickers had waited a while at Squirrel Spring, and then had gone home to organize a search-party. That was just starting out when Page and her cousin returned and told the story of their adventures.

The leaders of the search-party went to the hotel and sent a telephone message to New Canaan, urging the sheriff to come at once, swear them in as deputies, and go to arrest the moonshiners. But Sheriff Price prudently replied that night was no time to roam the

woods looking for folks like that; he would come in the morning.

The next morning he ambled to the lake, and he and Harrison and Jimps and six or eight of the hotel men went to the place where the still had been. It was gone. Then they went to Butterfly Flat, and there learned from Mr. Sibold that a boy who had come to the store early that morning had said he had met 'Lijah Gooch and Boozer Sam Sawyer with a loaded wagon, far on the road to West Virginia.

"By now they 've crossed the line," said the sheriff. "It 's no use to ride after them."

Harrison gave an exclamation of disappointment. "There was another man at the still," he said, "a man they called 'Bill.' My cousin saw him. Did n't you see him, Jimps? Who was he?"

"Seemed like thar was somebody movin' round in them bushes," Jimps answered vaguely, "but I did n't git a view of him."

"Did n't you hear the other men call him 'Bill'?" persisted Harrison. "Was n't it Bill Poole, in whose house my cousin was shut up?"

"Maybe they did call him 'Bill,'" said

Jimps. "Bill ain't no uncommon name. Ef thar was a man, I ain't see him good. He was in the bushes."

"It 's a shame—a burning shame and disgrace—for such an outrage to go unpunished," Harrison said vehemently. "Those men ought to be caught and jailed; they deserve hanging."

'Oh! take things easy, son; take things easy," advised Mr. Sibold. "You 'll go farther and live longer."

Without answering, Harrison turned on his heel and went back to Starwink Camp in a very bad humor.

He announced his firm and violent opposition to Page's making the intended visit to the Sibolds. Who knew what dangers she would run into?

Page laughed at him and refused to give up her plans. He appealed to Mrs. Harvie. She was unwilling to interfere and change the plans made for Page's vacation by her parents, who were now traveling in the far West and could not be consulted. "It does seem to me" —the much-tried camp-mother heaved a sigh

—"that Page has tried out her whole bagful of tricks! Probably everything will go smoothly, the few days she is at the Sibolds'. They are the very ones to have charge of her —quiet, cautious people who will see, for their sake and hers, that she doesn't run risks. She has promised me that she will not disobey Mrs. Sibold. And really, you know, the region is safer, now that moonshine still has been broken up."

Harrison was not convinced, but he had to submit to Mrs. Harvie's judgment and to Page's wishes.

Page, having her own way, was in high good-humor on that last afternoon at camp, and asked Harrison to go with her to the Farlan cabin. She was eager to see Jimps, to hear from his own lips what had happened after they had left him in Rocky Hollow.

The Farlan home—if such a dear word may be applied to the squatters' hut—was in a bare, rocky opening beside the road that wound through the pass between Gap and Deer mountains. The house was built of rough chestnut logs, and was roofed with strips of

hemlock bark. There was a rude door on one side, but neither window nor chimney. When a fire was needed, it was built on the dirt floor, and the smoke found its way through the cracks in the walls and roof.

"Harrison! Do people really stay in that pen?" cried Page, who had never seen the place before. "Why, how can they live in it? Oh, look there! look!"

Sprawled in the sunshine in front of the hovel was a group that disentangled itself into two razorback pigs, three curs, and the Farlan baby. The dogs yelped, and at once the doorway became a frame filled with figures—Mrs. Farlan, Minta, Nance, Looey, and Sam.

"And they are smoking! even that little girl!"

Page spoke in an undertone, but Mrs. Farlan's keen ears caught the words. She gave a broad, toothless smile.

"Uh, they all smokes but the baby," she said. "An' he gits a whifft now an' then. 'Bacco 's good for folks. It 's victuals an' medicine an' comp'ny too."

Page gave an embarrassed murmur and

some words of greeting. Then she asked: "Where is Jimps? He stayed behind us yesterday, and I was afraid that awful man would get him. I was so relieved when my cousin said he saw him this morning, all safe."

"Uh, yes! Jimps is all right," said Mrs. Farlan.

"Jimps! uh, Jimps! Here 's yore lady," called Nance.

"M-m-m!" A murmured greeting came from a little distance.

Page looked around and up. Jimps was sprawled like a panther along a great limb of a chestnut-tree near the cabin. His face shone out of the green gloom with an eerie charm. Roaming the woodland, he had the wild beauty of a faun; with human creatures, he showed the roguish mirth and wilfulness of a puck; now, looking from the shadowy depths of the tree, he seemed both faun and puck, with a light in his eyes that promised something higher—or was it merely a reflected sunbeam?

"Why, Jimps!" exclaimed Page. "What are you doing up there?"

"I got a peckerwoods' nest here, an' we 're learnin' 'em to fly," he answered.

Page went to the tree and stood watching him. A birdling tried to flutter to a near-by bough, but its half-fledged wings failed to support it. As it was falling, Jimps caught it and set it gently back on the branch. It cheeped timidly, then it flapped its wings, made another effort, and succeeded in making a short flight.

There were four of the birds. Three of them learned to balance themselves, and were soon fluttering around in the tree. But the fourth bird was a weakling. Again and again and again Jimps caught it and replaced it on the bough. At last, without passion or remorse, he wrung its neck and tossed it to the dogs.

"O Jimps!" cried Page, shuddering. "How could you kill that poor helpless little bird?"

" 'T wa'n't no 'count," he said coolly. " 'T was a runt an' kept on tumblin' down. Them others c'n git on all right." He swung himself down out of the tree, and stood beside Page, grinning elfishly. "You jest ought to seen Pooles when they come back," he said. "They was plumb be-misted."

"Oh! did you stay till they came back?" Page asked excitedly. "What did they say? Were they mad with you? I should think you 'd have been afraid of them!"

"Course I ain't feared of 'em," boasted Jimps; then he said: "You don't think I let 'em see me, do you? I clumb a tree, an' I had to stay thar till after dark, for they was roamin' that country, lookin' for you. They put at that young un—Brat, they call it—to find out how you got out. Uh! they quarreled an' he whined."

"Poor little thing!" said Page.

Jimps grinned. "Thar he was, tellin' 'em 'bout me as good as he could, an' they not believin' him. Lawzee, it was funny! He kept a-sayin', 'It come down the chimbly! it come down the chimbly!' An' Bill was cussin' an' r'arin'. At last he let the critter alone an' started the dog on yore track. But he come back pretty soon. I reckon he give up after he found you went to Sibolds'."

"Were n't you afraid he 'd get your track?" asked Harrison.

"Thar wa'n't none to git," replied Jimps.

"When I clumb that tree, I stepped on rocks, an' picked 'em up behind me an' flung 'em away. An' nobody could n't see me in that bushy old chestnut. Come dark, I clumb down an' run like a turkey. Bill would 'a' shot me, sure."

"Why did n't you tell the sheriff that Bill Poole was the man at the still?" Harrison inquired. "Why did you shield him?"

"What was the good o' tellin'?" asked Jimps. "You can't jail or pen a man on say-so. Bill c'n say he happened thar, same as me, an' how 'm I to prove he was moonshinin'? Naw, suh! 'T wa'n't no use to name his name jest to make him mad at me an' do him no harm. My time will come to even with old Bill Poole. When I git a gun, I 'll plant him."

"O Jimps!" said Page. "Don't you know it 's wrong—it 's wicked—to talk and feel that way?"

"Wrong!" he echoed, as if the word had no meaning for him.

And, indeed, it had very little. Right and wrong—what did he know of them, that poor

little squatter in the wild mountain cove? Once a year, perhaps, a traveling missionary—Catholic priest, Mormon elder, Evangelical preacher—came to the cabin in which the Farlans were tarrying, and for half an hour tried to guide them in the way for which years of precept and example are needed. Sometimes an officer of the Home Society found them and said the children ought to be taken away; but before he could come again the Farlans had flitted to another place.

Kind, wise people on the fertile farms lower down the mountain, in the neighborly villages in the valleys, and at the near-by hotel were truly trying to help these benighted and needy ones. But it was hard to reach the wild, flitting squatters. No one had ever got near the heart of Jimps, who grimaced now at the suggestion that it was "wrong" to kill a Poole. But his grimace changed quickly to a frown. "Thar they come ag'in," he muttered, looking up the path; and he slipped behind the tree.

Page and Harrison looked around.

A group of people was coming toward the cabin. Mrs. Candler and Reginald were in

front. Behind them two girls, with reddened cheeks and hair wadded over their ears, were giggling and talking loudly with two sleek, dark, stout young men. These sight-seers advanced without word or gesture of salutation, and stared at the Farlans as if they were so many wild animals in a menagerie.

The Farlans stolidly returned the stare. They were used to these silly, curious people, who came to gaze at the squatters, tossed them coins, and laughed at the money's being spent for tobacco and whisky instead of for wholesome food and decent clothes.

"O Angelina! Gwendolen!" shrilled Mrs. Candler. "That woman and the girls are smoking! *Smoking!* Corn-cob pipes. Oh, is n't it disgusting? See how horrid they look, Reginald darling, and never, never put filthy tobacco into your sweet, precious mouth."

"Sim, that biggest girl 'd be a daisy, dolled up," said the stouter man, gazing at Minta's rosy cheeks and sparkling dark eyes.

"If there were any of her left, after the dirt was off. Gee! she 's grimy," answered Sim. "Say, Sis, I 'll send you a cake of soap."

Minta tossed her head. "Lawzee! How much soap do you-all folks want me to have? I 've got both them two cakes a hoteler give me last summer."

"Make it candy instead of soap, Joey," Sim advised, with a guffaw.

"Hush, you naughty boys!" Mrs. Candler chided laughingly. "Look at the smaller girl, Gwendolen. She 's rather pretty."

"Oh! she 's the one I saw at the hotel, selling minnows," said Gwendolen. "Her name is Nance."

"My name ain't Nance," said the child.

"It ain't? Why, I thought I saw you— It certainly was you. And you said your name was Nance."

"I got tired bein' named Nance," the girl said, inspired partly by desire to show off before the strangers and partly by a childish envy of their furbelowed names and clothes. "My name is—is Octavia Snowball Stickweed."

There was a shout of laughter.

"Say! this is great fun, you know," said Joey.

He flipped a silver coin to Nance, who, with-

out change of expression or word of thanks, caught it and gave it to her mother.

As Mrs. Farlan held out her hand for the coin, Reginald Candler gave an excited, jubilant squeal. "Look, Mama!" he cried. "Look there! That horrid ragged woman has got on a ring. It 's a ring like yours. Where you reckon she got it? Did she steal it, like that boy wanted to steal yours?"

"Oh, Reginald!" Page protested in a shocked undertone. "Many people have rings like that plain gold band. It 's a wedding-ring."

"Bet you it came out of a nickle prize-box," said Joey. "Say, old sister! how about it?"

Mrs. Farlan had stood stolidly facing her visitors, accepting their impertinence for the sake of the small coins that came with it, as a hungry dog takes kicks and crusts. But now her swarthy face flushed brick-red.

"I got as good a right to a ring as anybody," she snarled. "And it 's gold, too; it 's real gold. It belonged to my sister that 's dead."

"O Mama!" Reginald's impertinent little voice shrilled out. "You reckon her sister

stole it? Are they all stealers, all these dirty poor people?"

"Reginald!" exclaimed Page.

"Come away, Page," Harrison said in an undertone. "Let 's go home. I can hardly keep my hands off that impudent, rotten-spoilt little wretch. How do these folks stand him?"

"Look at Jimps," whispered Page.

Jimps had come from behind the tree. His lips were drawn back from his teeth in a snarl like an angry dog's, his dark brows were lowered, and his light, bright eyes gleamed fiercely between narrowed lids; he looked ready to spring upon Reginald and tear him limb from limb. It was for but an instant. His lips fell into lines of malicious mirth, he quirked up his brows, and his eyes sparkled mischievously. Then he sauntered away. In three or four minutes he came back, fondling something that he held closely in his hands, and stopped near Reginald.

"What 's that? Let me see," Reginald demanded.

Jimps shook his head, and moved away a few steps.

"Let me see that, boy! I tell you, let me see what you 've got."

With seeming reluctance, Jimps displayed a gray squirrel. He put it on his shoulder, and it cuddled under his chin like a pet kitten.

"Let me see that squirrel in my hands," Reginald said imperiously. "My cousin Marie 's got a squirrel in a cage. When I pinch its tail, it squeals; it squeals real loud. I bet I can make that one squeal. Here! let me try."

"Catch him," said Jimps.

He raised his arm. The squirrel ran to his hand and made a flying leap into the chestnut-tree.

"Make it come back! Make it come back, I say!" Reginald commanded angrily, pommeling Jimps with his fists.

The young mountaineer looked down serenely. Then he spoke in a gentle drawl: "I know whar thar 's a—well, you mought call it a squirrel—heap bigger an' prettier 'n that. 'T ain 't so far from here. I 'm going to see it now."

"I 'm going with you."

Jimps did not answer. He thrust his

thumbs in the armholes of his overalls and went off whistling. After a sly glance at his mother, Reginald followed. At the edge of the woods he hesitated and looked back.

"Um-m, it 's so pretty! Black with a white spot on its back," said Jimps, as if to himself. "An' its black bushy tail!" He chuckled with glee. "Folks mighty seldom tech one of 'em, but I know whar this one stays, jest a le-e-et-tle way off in the woods."

"I 'm going to see it. You 've got to show it to me," Reginald said arrogantly.

But he grew uneasy at getting so far away from his mama. He lagged again. Again he came to heel when Jimps said enticingly, "I don't aim to let folks know whar 't is; an' so near here, too!"

Presently the young mountaineer paused near a tumbled mass of rocks and looked keenly about.

"She stays thar," he said. "I 'm jest waitin' till winter, to trap her an' sell her hide. Mostly, she comes out this time o' evenin'. A-ah! Thar she is!"

The animal issuing from the rock-pile was

larger than any squirrel Reginald had seen. It had, as Jimps said, a pretty bushy black tail. It was followed at a little distance by five young ones with which it was starting out in quest of food. It paused and surveyed the boys calmly, and then ambled quietly along, with its tail slightly elevated.

"See thar! That 's the tail, the bushy pretty tail I was tellin' you 'bout. She 's holdin' it up, like it was to pull," said Jimps.

Reginald ran forward, squealing with delight.

"Don't let her get away! Don't let her get away!" he cried.

"Uh, she won't get away," promised Jimps. "That she won't!"

He retired a little distance and swung himself into a tree while Reginald ran toward the animal.

"Yank her tail!" shouted Jimps.

"You bet I will!" exclaimed Reginald.

The animal turned its back to him. It held its tail upright, like a flag of warning, and hopped up and down. A person familiar with quadrupeds might have warned Reginald that the creature was not behaving in a squir-

rel-like manner; that, indeed, it would be wise for him to flee as fast and as far as possible.

But Reginald had the valor of ignorance. He leaned forward to grasp the waving tail, and—went prostrate on the ground. A solar-plexus blow would not have laid him out more swiftly and effectively. He lay still a minute. Then he tried to get up, and dropped back, writhing and screeching.

The skunk, with her young ones, went serenely on through the woods. Experience had taught her that hers was the right of way, freely granted by all who knew her; and the stoutest foe would speedily retire when she ejected the malodorous contents of two scent-sacs which are as powerful defensive weapons as the venom-sacs of a serpent.

The Candler party had had its fill of heckling the Farlans, and was about to start home when strange sounds smote the ears—wild shriekings of mirth and of distress.

"Lawzee! what 's that?" said Mrs. Farlan. "It 's Jimps a-laughin'."

"An' that little rapscallion squallin', " said Minta.

"Mama! Mama! Mama!" came the howling voice.

"Reginald! it 's Reginald!" gasped Mrs. Candler. "Where are you, darling? What 's the matter? Oh, what *is* the matter?"

They all started in the direction from which the mingled voices were coming—Mrs. Candler, Gwendolen, Angelina, Sim, Joey, Page, Harrison, and all the Farlans including the baby and the dogs.

"Oh! oh! What has happened?" gasped Mrs. Candler, as the wind brought an eloquent odor to her nostrils. "He—he must have stumbled on a bad egg."

"A whole nestful," said Joey, slackening his pace.

"Lawzee! it's a polecat!" exclaimed Mrs. Farlan.

They halted, all but Mrs. Candler who caught her nose in her handkerchief and tried to advance to the rescue of her darling. But, winded by her run, she had to take breath, and that sickening, suffocating stench smote her in the face.

"Run, Reginald, run! Run, darling!" she

called. "Something—some terrible thing—is after you."

"It 's got me, Mama!" he cried.

And, indeed, it had "got" him, far more effectively than with teeth and claws.

"Get away and come to me," called Mrs. Candler.

She made a brave effort to stand her ground, but wavered at the odor that preceded Reginald as he came staggering toward her.

"I can't get away, Mama! I tell you, it 's got me! it 's got me!" he shrieked.

"It 's sure got you!" yelled Jimps, who had tumbled from his perch and was rolling on the ground in paroxysms of mirth.

"What—have you—done —to my child?—you wretch!" gasped Mrs. Candler.

"I ain't done nothin', " said Jimps triumphantly. "I ain't teched him. You could n't pay me to tech him—not with a forty-foot pole I would n't!"

As Reginald approached, every one, even his mother, fled before him; the odor was like an invisible moving wall.

"Oh, how terrible! what *is* it?" gasped Mrs.

Candler, who was having her first experience with *Mephitis mephitica.*

"A polecat!" called Harrison, pausing at a prudent distance. "You 'll have to take off your clothes, Reginald. Stop there."

But Reginald's one idea was to reach the adoring being whom his tears and howls had never before failed to bring to his rescue. On he came, straight toward his mother.

"Stop, my son! Stop! Please stop! Don't come any nearer; Reginald, you *must* stop! *stop!*" she implored and commanded.

He ran on, and she took to her heels; but, alas! Reginald, howling and shrieking, advanced faster than she could retreat. He overtook her and threw his arms around her knees. Overpowered by the noisome fumes, she dropped on the ground; Reginald tumbled beside her, and there they lay, writhing and racked with nausea.

It was all so absurdly, though miserably, funny that the onlookers could not help laughing. They roared until tears streamed down their cheeks and their sides fairly ached. At the slightest lull in their mirth, Reginald's

angry screeches made themselves heard, and excited louder peals of merriment.

Jimps was like a mirth-mad imp of mischief. He whirled around on tiptoe, clapping his hands and uttering peals of jeering laughter, which were so exasperating that Reginald, ill as he was, jumped up and pursued him. They circled around the clearing like Indians in a war-dance, Jimps whooping with glee and Reginald shrieking with rage and misery. At last Reginald gave up the vain chase and ran back to his mother.

"Take off—your clothes!" she gasped.

He jerked them off and rolled away from them. Then his mother staggered to her feet, wrapped him in her sweater, and bore him off toward the hotel.

Jimps pursued them. His mocking cry followed them even to their cottage door: "Oh, mommer's sweet pet! *sweet pet!!* SWEET PET!!"

CHAPTER VIII

A WEEK passed. Starwink Camp was forsaken; its joys were things of memory and of anticipation. Mrs. Harvie and her sons had gone home; Mary Watkins and Elinor Lane were on a motoring trip with Anne Lewis and her adoptive family. Page Ruffin was with the Sibolds at Butterfly Flat. Harrison had gone on the hike that was to end at Hilltop Lake a few days later; then he and Page were to return home.

One pleasant morning Mrs. Sibold and Page went to Lake Hotel to carry some butter and eggs. Leaving the good dame to bargain with the steward, Page strolled down to the lake. How lovely it was, and how oblivious of the dear, beautiful days. There it lay, as smiling and placid as if the Starwink campers' canoes and diving forms had never broken its surface. She turned her back on it and wandered desolately around the old camp ground, then

she plodded up the path. Silently and with downcast eyes, she climbed into the rickety buggy.

"What ails you, dear?" asked Mrs. Sibold, as she drove down the road. "Are you sick, not to be talking and smily?"

"Our old camp makes me—oh! sort of forlorn," Page said; and then she added almost indignantly: "I wish places looked as if they remembered and loved the happy times that have been there, as if they belonged to the things that belong to them. I wish, oh! I wish they did n't forget."

Mrs. Sibold shook her head so vigorously that all her double chins wabbled.

"There 's two sides to that, my dear. If they remembered the pleasant happenings, I reckon they 'd have to remember the other kind, too. So it 's lucky for things to pass without leaving a shadow, like that cloud up there.

"Ah, Page child! A many sad and terrible thing has happened here in these mountains. This was wild and dangerous land when the first settlers came up here, clearing little

patches and guarding their stock and themselves against wolves and bears and panthers, and against Indians, the bloody Shawnees swooping down to wipe out settlements. You 've heard about Mary Draper Ingles, that they carried off to the Ohio country, and how she got away and tramped home, forty long hard days' journey?"

"She was a wonderful, brave woman," said Page.

"I warrant the mountains looked awful and fierce to her, limping along, trying to find nuts and berries to keep life in her body. And they were lonesome places for all settler women when their men-folks went off to trade furs for salt and iron. It took weeks and weeks to make the trip horseback to Salisbury, down in North Carolina, going in winter when there was least danger of Indian raids, and leaving the women at home with rifles and bear-dogs to fend off beasts and redskins."

"It 's interesting to think how things were then, and how different they are now," commented Page.

"Well, Indians and wolves and panthers are

gone,'' said Mrs. Sibold. ''But the mountains are here, strong and rough and hard to tame. Oh! they look mighty pleasant to you in summer-time. There 's that road between Gap Mountain and Deer Mountain; you were talking yesterday about how pretty it is. Um! um! um!'' She shook her head and flapped the old roan mare with the loose reins.

''Yes,'' said Page. ''It is a lovely road, winding through the chestnut woods, with the mountains on both sides.''

''The mountains on both sides,'' Mrs. Sibold repeated. Her mild eyes looked back, far into the past. ''And in the winter the winds go howling there and the snow drifts till it maybe fills the gap. That 's what it did one January that I mind mighty well. It was thirty years ago. Jefsey was clerking for Mr. France, that had a store and a mill half-way down the mountain.

''I well remember the day the Bane boys—Bud was eighteen and Zack was just turned fifteen—came to the mill and had their corn ground and started home, toting the bag turn about. I remember just how that cloud looked,

dark and heavy. It spit big flakes a while; then snow came blinding thick, with the wind beating it like flails. The storm caught the boys."

She paused and sighed.

"The next day Andy Bane came to the mill for folks to help find them. Jefsey and the others went up the mountain, with Mr. France 's horse, that was wise as a man, going ahead to open a way. They found the boys in that pass between Gap and Deer, under the snow. Zack had given up first. There was the meal-bag in the road, where Bud had set it down; he had gone back and was standing with his hands under Zack's elbows, to histe him up. Only a quarter of a mile from home! And both of them frozen stiff." The old woman nodded her head. "That 's what I see, dear, when I go through that pass, and I 'm glad the sight ain't fixed there for folks coming after me. Thirty years ago that was."

"I was thinking, at first, of the pleasant things. There are the other kind. Oh, I know that." Page shuddered. After a pause she said: "Thirty years ago, Mrs. Sibold! You 've lived in the mountains a long time."

"All my life," answered Mrs. Sibold. "Me and Jefsey was from the same settlement."

"You aren't like the other people round here," said Page.

"We are different," Mrs. Sibold replied. "We are Hessians."

"Hessians!" exclaimed Page. "Why, I thought the Hessians were in history books." She laughed. "I mean, that 's the only place I ever think of their being in America. You aren't joking?"

"Hessians we are," Mrs. Sibold repeated. "You see, the Hessians were people that were sent over—they didn't come of their will and desire—to fight in the Revolution."

"Oh! I know." Page hastily aired her text-book knowledge. "They were hired to King George, that German king of England, to fight the colonists. They surrendered to Washington at Trenton."

"And then what became of them?" asked Mrs. Sibold.

"I don't know," said Page.

"Well, I can tell you about some of those Hessians, for they were my people and Jefsey's,

and the tale has come down straight. They were sent for safe-keeping to Virginia. Then the Redcoats came South. Folks did n't know where Tarleton and the other Britishers would march and raid, but they did know the mountains were a wall that would keep them back. So they sent the Hessians—some of them, anyway—to the Alleghanies. Then the war ended. And somehow the Government seemed to forget those Hessian prisoners. They stayed in the mountains, and here their folks are now—hard-working, law-abiding people, the most of them—Kinzers, Keisters, Brozes, Lugars, Prizes, and others."

"And you really are— Oh, look!" Page interrupted herself. "There are the Farlans."

They were crossing the road, Minta carrying the baby poised on her hip as usual, Nance with a bucket of minnows, Looey and Sam trailing behind. Jimps had flitted ahead and was lying on the ground, gazing up through the flickering chestnut leaves into the blue misty depths of the sky. Page heard his sweet clear whistle, that rippled and rustled like the summer outdoors.

By this time the winding road had come to the stream above Butterfly Flat.

"Oh!" said Page. "I like this place where Falling Water goes along gurgling like a happy baby."

"H'm! That little creek looks mighty pretty and playful to you," said Mrs. Sibold, shaking her head and frowning at the stream. "But it 's bad and wild in storm times."

"That merry little stream!"

Mrs. Sibold shook her head emphatically. "Ah! you have n't seen it on a rampage in a flood. Oh, the power of that swift water! I 'll never forget the day it took Mr. Sheringham's child. Never!"

"Mr. Sheringham's child!" Page exclaimed. "Not that Mr. Sheringham in Rocky Hollow—the man people call 'old Shearam'?"

"Shearam 's the way folks hereabouts call the name," said Mrs. Sibold. "But it 's Sher-ing-ham, spelt out on his letters."

"I never thought of his having chick or child," said Page; "he seems so by himself."

"All alone and by himself he is," Mrs. Sibold agreed. "But he had a wife and he had a

child.'' And then, liking nothing better than to drone out her reminiscences, she told the story of which Falling Water reminded her.

''First I knew Mr. Sheringham, he came up here hunting, eight or ten years ago, with some other men. They had a cabin built and they named it 'Jolly Hunters' Lodge'; it 's the place folks call now 'Shearam's Den.' Well, Mr. Sheringham fell in love with Nancy Bane—she was a pretty girl and a smart one, too—and they were married. They stayed a while honeymooning in that cabin, and then they went away. And two or three years after, she came back. She had run away from her husband and come home to her own folks with her boy. That was the child that fell into Falling Water, in the rapids right below Butterfly Flat.''

''And it was—was drowned?'' Page asked.

''Yes. It was swept over Crystal Falls into that deep pool, and they never even got its body for its poor mother to cry over. She went up and down the stream like a crazy woman, begging for her baby. She was puny and ailing then, and she died not long after, poor soul! That was three years ago.''

"Poor mother! Poor little child!" Page exclaimed.

"Ah, well! The little thing could n't suffer much in the swift minutes from Butterfly Flat to Crystal Falls."

"Yes, yes!" said Page, shuddering. "It 's terrible, but not so bad— Oh! a child 's better dead than shut up like that little fellow at the Pooles'. O Mrs. Sibold! I keep thinking about him. I see it in my dreams even—that lovely face, that looks so pitiful and so—so empty. What is the matter with him?"

"Nothing. You could n't see him good in that dark place, and you were all worked up. He's a right well-favored child—or was. I have n't seen him for a long time, not since he took to running off and they shut him up."

"And you say they 've had him for years? those awful people!"

"Six or seven years. They brought him from the porehouse the spring after Marthy broke her leg."

"Oh, dear!" Page sighed.

She did not speak again, and when they stopped at Butterfly Flat she went soberly out

to the hammock. There she sat, frowning at an unopened book, blind and deaf to the beauty of the summer day. She saw only the child grasping at the one sunbeam flickering into that gloomy hut; she heard only his whimpering cries, that faltering, sweet "Be good, girl, be good!" Tears rained down her cheeks.

If only her father were here, he would find a way to rescue the imprisoned child. Or Harrison; he might be able to do or to suggest something. But suppose the child died before Harrison came back? How could he keep on living, shut up in that dungeon?

"Oh! somebody has got to do something," she said vehemently. "Somebody must help that child, and I reckon it 's me. But what can I do?"

Suddenly she heard a familiar whistle, and she sprang up and clapped her hands. Then her face fell.

"But no!" she said. "It can't be."

The whistle, which ended with a ripple and a gurgle, was repeated. Page gave an answering whistle and ran across the flat, over the foot-bridge, and along the path. There, be-

side a spring that trickled from under the cliff, Jimps Farlan was lying at ease.

"Oh! here you are. You really are here," Page said breathlessly. "I thought I must have imagined I heard you, for I 'd just seen you on the road. But when you whistled again, I knew it was you."

"We met some men an' sold our minnows. We come here to git some more. I 'm goin' up the clifft presen'ly. The light 's jest right to make them sparklers shine pretty. You mought want to go."

"I do. I should love to see our Jewel-Box," said Page. "But there 's something else I want—oh! more than anything in the world. It 's to do something for that child, poor Brat. But I don't dare go there by myself."

"I mought go with you," said Jimps.

"Oh! you can't," said Page. "You say the Pooles will shoot you if they catch you there."

"Um-h'm! That makes it more fun to go," replied Jimps, his sweet, faunlike look changing to a puckish grin. "I was aimin' to go thar real soon, an' do somethin' to plague 'em. I c'n go now, good as any time."

"Well—but no! I 'm afraid for you to go. Suppose the Pooles see you?"

"S'pose they don't? A good day like this, old Bill an' Marthy 's apt to be off huckleberryin', or fishin', or somethin'. We c'n fox round an' find out if they 're home."

"I 'll run back and get some candy, and I 'll ask Mrs. Sibold for doughnuts. She can think they 're for me."

"I 'll be waitin' down-stream," said Jimps.

Page returned to the Sibolds', and in a few minutes came back down Falling Water. She found the Farlan children fishing for minnows a little below the spring. All of them except Jimps had fishing-poles. He was standing in the stream; and now and then he darted forward, thrust his hands into the water, and brought out a wriggling little fish. When Page called to him, he dropped a minnow into the bucket and scrambled up to the path.

"You Jimps!" called Minta. "Stay here an' holp git minnows. You c'n ketch more with yore bare hands than we-all with hooks an' lines."

Without answering, he went on his way.

He and Page followed the path down Falling Water, and turned up Rocky Hollow. There the trail led close to the little stream called Rocky Run. Jimps flitted on,—now dancing merrily like the rushing brook, now gliding along by still pools,—and his voice crooned and murmured and rippled like the plashing water. He only nodded his head or laughed or grimaced when Page spoke to him; and at last she was silent, and strolled along, thinking what a sweet, wild, playful creature he was, as full of harmless mirth as a glancing sunbeam.

Just then they came to the knoll on which "Shearam's Den" was perched. Jimps scowled and picked up a stone and hurled it at the window. Most of the panes were already broken, and the stone went through a hole and clattered on the floor.

"O Jimps!" Page remonstrated. "Goodness! Why did you do that?"

"He 's sich a mean old man," Jimps said vindictively. "I 'd like to bust his head open. Hark! Thar 's somebody. Git behind that rock, quick!"

Page hurriedly obeyed, expecting Mr. Sher-

ingham to appear and pursue and punish them. But a moment later she realized that the voices and footsteps were coming down the path. Peeping around the rock, she saw through the foliage the gorilla-like man she had caught a glimpse of at the still. A woman was with him.

"Pooles! old Bill an' Marthy!" whispered Jimps.

Page hardly dared to breathe; not until long after the couple was out of sight and hearing did she follow Jimps back to the path.

"Maybe—maybe we 'd better not go to that cabin," she said fearfully.

"Not go?—in sich luck, too!" exclaimed Jimps. "Pooles is out the way for two-three hours sure. They 're goin' to the store, to do thar tradin'. Marthy had a bucket o' huckleberries."

"We-ell. Do they always leave Brat there alone?"

"I reckon so," answered Jimps. "What would they do with him?"

"Mrs. Sibold says they 've had the poor child ever since he was a baby," said Page.

"Um-h'm. He 's 'bout old as Looey; she was the baby when they come from the pore-house."

"I don't see how he keeps on living, shut up in that black hole," Page said, shuddering.

"We heared tell he was dead onct," said Jimps; "but that wa'n't so. They 'd jest took to shettin' him up 'cause he runned off when he got a chanct. He got past old Shear-am's onct, 'most to Fallin' Water—Pap Martin seen him—'fore Pooles cotch him. Now they keep the house door locked."

"And the poor child in that dark, horrid place!" said Page.

"He ought to mind 'em an' not run away," Jimps responded unsympathetically.

They were now approaching the Pooles' cabin.

"How on earth are we going to give the things to Brat?" asked Page.

"I c'n go down the chimbly ag'in," said Jimps.

"That would scare him so," she objected. "He was terrified, and so was I, when we heard you tumbling down and saw you standing on the hearth, all sooty and grinning. And the

Pooles might come back and catch you in the house.''

''I c'n stand on the chimbly an' throw the things down,'' he suggested.

''He might never get them. He would n't think of looking in the ashes,'' said Page. ''Anyway, I want to give them to him. I want him to take them from us and know that we are his friends.''

''I c'n bust a hole twixen the logs, whar you c'n poke 'em in,'' said Jimps.

This suggestion found favor with Page. If there were a hole in the wall, she could not only thrust the things inside, but also peep in and see Brat and talk to him. Perhaps he would remember her friendly voice and would answer her.

Jimps found an old ax and knocked out the daubing and broke the chinking between two logs.

''Whew! it 's hot,'' he said, pausing to mop away with his arm the sweat that dripped from his face.

The morning's misty sky had deepened into a dazzling blue, and on the horizon were piled

great thunder-heads, white where the sunlight caught them, and boiling up below in angry dark masses.

"Thar! The hole 's big enough. Poke in the things," Jimps said presently; then he laughed. "I bet Brat is scroonched down in that trash, shakin' like a leaf, he 's so skeered."

"Oh! I hope not; but I 'm afraid he is," Page replied. She put her face close to the crack and said gently: "Brat! Brat! We 've come to see you. I 'm the girl that was fastened up here the other day, the one you told to 'be good.' I 've brought you some candy and cakes and a pretty top. Come and get them. Here 's a nice brown doughnut."

She pushed the cake into the hole, and it fell on the floor. There was a shivery squeal. She called and coaxed and entreated; but the child, crouching under the table, did not answer.

"I reckon we 'll have to give up," she said at last, with a sigh. "I hope he 'll find the things after he gets over being so scared, and then he 'll know we are his friends. Next time surely he 'll not be so afraid of us. Oh, dear!

The top won't go through this hole."

"Bet I c'n make it go," said Jimps.

He turned the toy this way and that, but in vain.

"I 'll bust a bigger hole," he said. He hacked and hewed on the log a while, then he said; "Thar! Now I c'n chunk it in."

"Do. And then we must go," said Page.

"Uh! Pooles ain't had time to go to the store and git back," he said.

"I keep expecting them all the time," she confessed.

She went to the corner of the cabin, glanced up the path, and, springing back, caught Jimps by the shoulder.

"There she is!" she cried. "There 's the woman. They 're coming!"

"Run! To the woods. Keep the cabin twixen you an' them."

Jimps started to follow Page; then he saw that Marthy Poole was alone and walking slowly to favor her lame leg. Bill might be behind her on the path, or he might be miles away. After going to so much trouble to enlarge that hole, it was a pity not to give the top

to Brat. Jimps ran back and put the toy into the opening. It caught on a rough edge of the log. He had to pull it out, turn it around, and push again before it went in and fell clattering on the cabin floor. Then he, too, sped to shelter.

At the edge of the woods, he turned to look back. He caught his foot on a root and fell sprawling, and a jagged stone gashed his cheek.

"Drat them Pooles!" he said, as angrily as if Bill's knife had made the wound.

Mopping the blood from his face with the back of his hand, he ran on, and a moment later joined Page in the thicket.

"I 'd like to kill Pooles an' take Brat away!" he cried, clenching his fist, with a feeling of having common cause with the child for whom he was suffering.

"Oh! I do wish we could take him away," exclaimed Page.

"Let 's do it," said Jimps, and his face lighted up. "Lawzee! Won't it make Pooles mad!"

CHAPTER IX

"O JIMPS! I wish we could get him now, right now!" cried Page.

"We could, ef Marthy wa'n't thar," said Jimps. "I dunno what the old fool come back for. She ain't had time to take her huckleberries to the store. We 'll fox round an' see what she 's up to. I ain't in no rush to go, 'less I see Bill."

He and Page perched themselves upon a rock where, screened by the foliage, they could watch the cabin.

What was Marthy Poole doing in the house? they wondered. What would she think when she discovered that hole? Would she believe Brat had made it? and punish him?

As a matter of fact, Marthy had left her berries beside the path and returned to get a rattlesnake skin she hoped to sell. Without seeing the hole which was concealed by a corner of the bed, she dropped down on the doorsill to

rest. Presently she glanced toward the table, where Brat was crouched, muttering to himself.

"You Brat! Come here," she called loudly but not unkindly.

He crawled out and came staggering toward her. She caught him by the arm and spoke slowly and emphatically, as if addressing a deaf person.

"You look on the table an' git that snake hide an' bring it to me."

The child's vacant eyes turned toward her and then wandered away. When she repeated her command, he went with halting, uneven steps to the table, and brought the snake skin wrapped in a dirty rag. As he approached the door, open to the sunlit summer world, a change came over him. A smile drifted across his face; he spread his little hands toward the grateful sunshine, and took two or three eager, furtive steps.

"You Brat! Whar you goin'?" asked Marthy, catching him by the shoulder.

He gave a murmur that she translated into words: "You dunno? Then what you goin' for?"

He put his hands to his temples and began to whimper.

"Is yore head bad?" she asked. "Pore Brat! pore little Brat!"

She put her big, rough hands very gently on his head. The child crouched at her side and murmured softly while she stroked his aching brow.

"I wisht you would n't try to run off," she said, gazing at him with an expression of helpless perplexity. "Lawd knows I do!"

Presently she looked at the sky and frowned.

"A storm 's comin', an' comin' fast," she said. "I doubt I c'n make it to the store 'fore it breaks. Ef I hadn 't left them berries on the path, I 'd stay right here. But I reckon I got to go."

She lifted the child, put him in the house, and shut the door. He beat on the door urgently with his little fists and screamed again and again. It was a strange, unhuman cry, like an animal in a nightmare of pain and terror. Marthy groaned and shuddered at the sound; but she fastened the door and limped down the path.

"Wh-what 's that?" stammered Jimps. "Is she killin' him?"

"Oh! oh! Isn't it terrible?" gasped Page. "That 's the same noise—I heard it—I don't know—"

Marthy was now out of sight, and Jimps and Page ran to the cabin. Jimps climbed to the roof and dropped down the chimney and flung open the shutter. Then he went to the table, and Page heard whimpering cries and sounds of a scuffle.

"He 's all right; she ain't hurt him. But he won't come out, the little fool! He 's fightin' me off like a bobcat."

"O Jimps! can't you make friends with him?" Page said imploringly.

She scrambled up on the rough logs and leaned in the window, calling to the child: "Brat! Brat! come on with us. Come away from this horrid place."

"He 's skeerier 'n a old crow," said Jimps. "We ain't got time now to tame him. We got to make tracks 'fore Pooles come back. Out you go, tadpole!"

He pulled the child from under the table and

carried him to the window and put him out. Page caught at his arm; but, in a paroxysm of terror, he jerked away, leaving a rag of his shirt-sleeve in her hand.

But he did not scurry off to hide in the woods or to overtake Marthy on the path. He staggered to the door and beat on it with his little weak hands; then he ran around the house, keeping his fingers on the familiar logs, and crawled under the grindstone in the corner by the chimney. Poor creature! That was the place most like his forlorn refuge under the table that he could find. He buried his face in his hands and crouched there, moaning and quivering.

"Honey words ain't no good," Jimps said bluntly to Page, who was trying to soothe the child. "You jest skeerin' him worser. We got to hurry 'way from here; tote him off an' tame him when we git time."

He caught up the resisting child and started down the path at a dogtrot.

"We want to git to Fallin' Water 'fore Pooles come back," he said. "We c'n go a piece down-stream; an' when we see 'em turn

up the hollow, we c'n travel up-stream an' take Brat to Sibolds'."

"Oh!" There were dismay and uncertainty in Page's voice. She had been too eager to get Brat away from the wretched cabin where he was imprisoned to consider what they were to do with him. Now, for the first time, she reflected on the difficulties before them. "Mr. Sibold won't be willing to have him there," she said. "He 's so afraid of getting mixed up in a fuss! O Jimps! What can we do with the poor little thing?"

"I c'n take him home," said Jimps. "But he c'n git out twixen them logs anywhar, and he 'd run off sure. I tell you! Let 's take him down to the old sawmill. I c'n pen him in thar, an' we c'n tote victuals to him. Keep still, you little imp! Whew! that 's a black cloud!"

"Is—is it going to storm?" faltered Page. "I don't mind rain, but a storm—"

"Them 's thunder-heads," Jimps said carelessly. "Hark! What 's that? Lawzee! It 's them!"

There was no mistaking the voices, the gruff

drawl of Bill Poole and the thin, nasal tones of his wife.

Page and Jimps ran into the bushes and crouched behind a rock. They did not speak or move; they hardly breathed as the Pooles came on up the path.

"I saw that storm bilin' up," Bill was saying to his wife, "an' I knowed you would n't have time to make it to the store. So I come on back an' brung yore berries. Now, to-morrow—"

Page did not heed the end of the sentence. Just then the Pooles' dog, which had been sniffing at the ground, gave a sharp yelp and ran into the bushes. It bristled up and gave a fierce growl when it saw Page.

"They 've got us!" groaned Jimps.

But Brat smiled and held out his hand, saying softly, "Trailer! old Trailer!"

The dog stopped growling and looked from Page to the child; it trotted to him, dropped its muzzle into his palm, and stood silently accepting his caresses until Bill Poole, who had gone on up the path, gave a sharp whistle; then the dog turned and ran away.

"We 've got to leave Brat an' run," Jimps said in a hurried undertone.

"But Jimps—"

He cut short Page's protest. "Bill 's got his gun. He 'll miss Brat, an' that dog 'll lead him back here. He 'll shoot us sure."

He pushed the child into the bushes—gently, in spite of the dire need for haste—and caught Page's arm and dragged her along with him.

"Ef we git away, we c'n come back for Brat. But ef they ketch us—uh, Lawd!" He groaned. "Thanks be, the rain 's a-comin'."

On they ran down the path. They did not take time to look back; even if they had, they could not have seen what was happening.

Bill and Marthy Poole went on till they came to the edge of the clearing. There Bill stopped short.

"Look thar!" he exclaimed. "The window 's open."

He jumped behind a tree, with his gun at the ready, and gave a sharp low call to his dog, which came at once and crouched beside him.

"I reckon it 's revenues," he said. "Maybe they 're thar now. You go an' see, Marthy."

It was not cowardice that made him send his wife forward while he waited. He knew that if the officers were inside they would not harm the woman; and she could call a warning that would give him a chance to escape.

Marthy went across the clearing, hallooing: "Hey! hey! Who 's thar? Who 's broke in my house? Hey! hello!"

There was no answer.

She approached the cabin slowly and cautiously, stopping every few steps to call and to wait for an answer. She gazed at the open window, but she did not dare look in—perhaps to put her head against the muzzle of a gun. She got the key; unlocked the door; and, with a final halloo to whoever might be inside, she threw open the door. No one was in sight. After standing two or three minutes on the threshold, peering about, she went in and searched the room and the loft above. The place was empty; empty indeed. For now she realized what she had not noticed at first—that Brat was gone.

"Bill! uh, Bill!" she called. "Ain't nobody here; but somebody 's been an' took Brat!"

In a twinkling Bill Poole was in the cabin.

"Drat it!" he cried. "Trailer was scentin' 'em—an' me whistlin' him off 'stead o' lookin'! Here, Trailer, here, suh! Track 'em, track 'em, I say!"

The dog ran down the path and led its master straight to Brat. He was sitting just where Jimps had left him, crooning softly and grasping at the sunbeams flickering through the foliage.

"How 'd you git here?" Bill demanded, with an oath.

The child stopped babbling to himself and gave the man a dazed look.

"How 'd you git here? Who let you out?" Bill asked again.

"You 're too rough," said Marthy. "Here! Le' me ax him." She took the child by the shoulders and demanded his wandering attention. "How—did—you—git—out?"

Brat shivered and whined. "The window! the window! An' took me."

"Who was it? An' how did they open the window?" asked Bill.

"The window! An' took me," Brat repeated.

Bill jerked out an oath. "Leave him be, an' follow Trailer that 's got more sense," he said. "He 'll git thar track."

"That he won't; not now," said Marthy. "In two minutes it 'll be rainin' an' thar won't be no tracks to git."

Between them and Deer Mountain, on the other side of Falling Water, there was a curtain of rain. The storm had already broken there, and now was sweeping up the hollow. A few big raindrops came plashing down. There was a sultry, ominous hush, and then a gust of wind. The clouds, closing and darkening overhead, were cut by swordlike flashes of lightning.

"Here comes the storm," said Marthy. "I 'm goin' home. 'T ain't no sense in keepin' my rheumatiz out in the wet."

With a volley of oaths, Bill too gave up the pursuit. He whistled the dog back and they followed the home-going path. When they came to Brat, Marthy took him by the hand.

"Honey," she said, "what makes you so heady 'bout runnin' 'way? Uh, Brat! Brat! Why ain't you like—like folks?"

She led the child back to the cabin and put

him inside. He went to the old table and crouched down in the rubbish. Presently he raised his head and peeped out. Bill and Marthy Poole were sitting at the cabin door, so upset and puzzled by the invasion of their den that they did not heed even the tempest pouring and flashing and crashing around them, much less the child.

The room was as usual, except for that hole between the logs and some things scattered on the floor. The child gazed a long time at one of these, a little red-and-white stick; then he sidled toward it and picked it up. He scuttled back under the table and peered again at the Pooles; but they were still sitting with their faces toward the stormy outdoors. Unnoticed, he found and feasted on the goodies that Page had brought.

The storm that drove the Pooles home found Page and Jimps half-way down Rocky Hollow. Page had thought that she was traveling her fastest; but a sharp flash of lightning, closely followed by a deafening peal of thunder, made her catch her breath and quicken her pace.

"O Jimps! A storm is coming!" she cried.

"It 's done come," Jimps answered. "It 's rainin' on Deer Mountain now. It 'll be pourin' bucketfuls here in a minute."

"I don't mind the rain. It 's the lightning, the thunder! They 're so awful! Oh! oh!" She screamed as the lightning flashed again. "We must take shelter somewhere."

"We c'n set under a rock, ef you want to," he said. "But we 'd best keep goin'. Ef lightning's goin' to hit you, it 'll hit you—zip!"

"Oh! oh!" Page jumped and stumbled as another zigzag flash rent the cloud and the thunder bombarded the mountains.

"What makes you so skeered?" asked Jimps.

"I don't know—but I am. I never was out in a storm before. I feel as if it 's all aimed at me and bound to strike me. Oh! oh! Thank goodness, there 's a house, Mr. Sheringham's. Come on, Jimps. Run!" She caught him by the hand and pulled him along, crying, "Oh, hurry! Run!"

"I 'm not goin' thar," said Jimps.

"But you must! I 'll die if I stay out here!"

"I don't want to go thar," he said, jerking away from her. "You leave me be."

Page caught his arm. "We must go there, out of this awful storm," she cried.

They struggled with each other, he trying to drag her on, and she, with the strength of her desperate terror, pulling him toward the house till they were at the very doorstep of "Shearam's Den."

"And we 'll try to get Mr. Sheringham to help Brat," said Page eagerly.

"Aw, come on 'way!" snarled Jimps. "Shearam won't help nobody. Ef you put his heart in a turnip seed, it would leave room to rattle—it 's that little. I wouldn 't go in his house—not to save his life, or your'n or mine."

"But why—"

What Page might have asked and Jimps might have told was cut short. Sharp lightning rent the sky. Page screamed and cowered against the door; before she could raise her hand to knock, a gust of wind dashed it open.

What a forlorn, miserable place! The room had not the squalor and bareness of the Poole cabin. Indeed, it had once been well fitted up

and furnished; but now everything was dismal and dirty and wretched. Soiled rags of curtains hung askew at the windows and fluttered in the rain that pelted through the openings. Two or three broken chairs were flung in a corner. There was a fine old walnut table in the middle of the room. On it were an overturned lantern, pipes dribbling stale tobacco, books dropped pell-mell, a litter of dusty papers and empty tobacco-bags. On the walls, festooned with dirty cobwebs, were old fishing-tackle, a riding-crop, and an English pigskin saddle.

The cloud closing down upon the hollow made the room a part of its gray gloom. One could fancy that the place had never known sunshine, that it was in—was itself—the heart of a never-lifting cloud.

As Page stood on the threshold, the door of a shed-room opened and a man appeared who fitted the room as a picture fits its frame. He also was forlorn and dreary.

As years go, he was just beyond his youth—in the middle thirties, perhaps—but he was thin and haggard like an old man who has lived

out his sorry life and left it behind. His untrimmed brown hair, already touched with gray, straggled from under a torn felt hat. He had a ragged brownish beard, large restless blue eyes, a finely cut nose with deep lines running from it to the corners of his drooping, weak mouth. It was the face of an unhappy, a miserable man; but, though he confronted Page with a scowl, she knew instinctively that he was not cruel, nor even unkind.

"I beg your pardon—" she began.

At the greeting of courtesy, the man mechanically put up his hand to remove his torn hat. Then his face darkened and he said harshly, "What do you mean by forcing your way into my house?"

"The wind opened the door," Page said. "I was about to knock. I wanted to get out of the storm, and to ask you— Oh!" She cried out, and put her hands over her eyes, as the lightning flashed vividly. "I am so afraid of a storm! May n't I come in till it 's over?"

"If you must." The man gave a grudging permission. He moved a book from a rickety chair. "Sit down."

He was turning away, as if to go back to the shed-room.

"It is n't only the storm," Page cried, desperately, stopping him. "There 's a poor child. Won't you help—"

"No," he interrupted.

"But this poor little Brat—oh! he 's so miserable-looking," pleaded Page. "Those Pooles, Bill and Marthy, who live in the hollow above you, brought him from the poorhouse. They keep him shut up in that horrible cabin. You would n't treat a dog that way. He will die if he stays there. Won't you—"

"No." His voice rose harshly above the pouring and crashing of the storm. "No."

"But it 's so terrible to keep a child shut up like that. He is—"

"It 's none of my business," Mr. Sheringham broke in again; "and I can't see that it 's any of your business."

"But the Pooles have no right to the child," Page insisted. "Won't you do something—help get him away and put him where he will be taken care of?"

"No," he repeated sternly. "I let everybody

alone. And I want to be let alone myself, here in my God-forsaken hole."

"Oh! but—but—" Page made a helpless, protesting murmur.

As the man gazed past her toward the gloomy, storm-swept mountain, he saw Jimps, and said ungraciously: "She 's here. You may as well come in."

Page was startled by the face that Jimps turned toward them. His eyes were blazing and his lips were writhing.

"I wouldn 't step in yore door, not to save yore life I would n't," he said slowly and venomously.

"Why, Jimps!" exclaimed Page.

She looked at Mr. Sheringham, who merely shrugged his shoulders and was turning contemptuously away.

Jimps spoke again. It was as if the floodgates were down now, and his passion had to rush forth. "Meanest vilyan unhung! You—you—" He spit out epithets and oaths.

Mr. Sheringham's look of surprise changed to one of wrath. He raised his fist and started toward the boy.

"You impudent dog! Who are you? And what—"

Jimps did not move.

"My mammy was Minta Bane. Nance Bane was her sister."

Page uttered an exclamation. Nance Bane, Mr. Sheringham's wife, the mother of the drowned child—Nance Bane was Jimps Farlan's aunt! Page stared at Jimps a minute, and then turned toward Mr. Sheringham.

The man's face had blanched and was quivering. He looked as if he were about to crumple together and fall. Then he caught hold of the table, and stood, stiff and rigid. He did not speak to Jimps, nor look at him. The miserable, haunted eyes were fixed on the distance, as if gazing at some poignant, unescapable vision.

"I would have given my life—my life—" he muttered, clutching at his throat as if he were choking.

Jimp's hard voice cut in: "Stay thar, Page, ef you 're a mind to. I 'm gone."

He turned and walked down the trail.

The storm had passed as suddenly as it had

come. The thunder was rumbling in the distance. The rain, touched to silver by the sunshine, was coming now in a gentle shower.

Page started to follow Jimps; then she paused and glanced at Mr. Sheringham. He was looking out of the door, gazing at the mountains as a wrecked man clinging to a drifting spar might gaze at the sea that had taken from him all except life.

How could she go—leave him alone in his misery without one friendly word? But what was there to say? She went to the door, and then turned back and held out her hand. He did not touch it, did not seem to see it.

"Good-by," she said timidly. "I 'm—I 'm sorry; with all my heart."

And then she ran down the path after Jimps.

With clenched fists and scowling brow, the boy had hurried away from the cabin. At first he saw nothing of the beauty of the shining woodland, but by degrees and unconsciously it penetrated him. His hands relaxed and his brow cleared. He walked slowly, breathing in the flavor and brightness of the afternoon.

Then, as clear and sweet as the wood-god's

pipe, there came through the forest the song of the thrush. As soon might faun disregard the flute of Pan as Jimps pass heedless of that call. He stopped and answered it with notes as sweet and clear as its own. The song came nearer. The shy forest creature flitted forth, perched on a twig, and fixed its bright eyes on Jimps's face.

But, before he could take a step toward it, its song ceased and it flew away. Page, running down the trail, had frightened it.

"Jimps! Jimps!" she called. "I thought I 'd never catch up with you."

"I wisht you had n't," he said, with a scowl. "You skeered my thrush. You made it flew away. I 'm al'ays gittin' nigh him, an' 'fore I can friend him he 's skeered off."

"I 'm sorry," said Page.

"You 're always sorry when it don't do no good," Jimps responded ungraciously.

"Well," Page said sharply, "you ought not to have left me to come on alone."

"Huh! I go when an' whar I choose, 'thout botherin' 'bout folks. An' you had no business draggin' me to old Shearam's."

Page was about to answer angrily; but just then the distant notes of the wood-thrush floated through the evening air, and Jimps stood on tiptoe leaning forward, as if to start in quest of it. She laid her hand on his arm.

"Don't go," she pleaded. "Please don't leave me alone. And I want to ask you—Jimps, I didn't know that child—Mrs. Sibold told me about its being drowned in Falling Water—was kin to you."

"Uh, yes! Grief was mammy's sister's child," said Jimps.

"Grief! Was that the dear baby you told me about, the one you took into the woods and to the Jewel-Box?"

"Course," he answered. "When Aunt Nance runned 'way an' left old Shearam, she took his name off 'n her baby. She say he wa'n't Griffin Shearam no more; he was her child, named Grief—Grief Bane."

"And he was drowned? Poor little thing!"

"Yes. We-all was at the store, an' he slipped out an' went down to the creek. Uh, it was a-roarin' an' a-ragin'! Mammy see him jest as he tumbled in, an' she let out a yell.

We-all went a-flyin,' but, lawzee! the water had him, an' hit swept him on like a piece o' drift-wood over Little Falls. We-all run down-stream, hopin' to git him whar the current slowed. But he was gone over Crystal Falls in that deep hole whar things go flood-times an' don't come out."

"How terrible!" said Page.

"His pretty yaller head!" Jimps sighed. "Well, here you are, back at the flat."

"And there 's Mrs. Sibold on the porch, looking for me," said Page. She waved her hand and called: "I 'm coming. I 'm coming right away."

But still she lingered.

"Jimps," she said, "after all, we did n't have any right to take Brat. And certainly we did n't know what to do with him. He would n't have liked being in that old sawmill, alone, nights and storm times too. And we could n't have kept him there forever. I 've heard about a society whose business is to take care of children. I 'm going to write to father and ask about it and how to get it to help Brat. But," she sighed, "that 'll take so long!"

"I bet Dr. Wayne 'll know," said Jimps. "He knows ev'ything."

"Oh! Dr. Wayne at Manson," said Page, in sudden excitement. "Father says he 's a wonderful man and a fine doctor."

"Ef any folks in the mountains is sick or sorry, they send for Dr. Wayne," said Jimps. "He holps 'em all, but specially chillen. 'T was him got the little gal from that mean Dell Sawyer and give it to good old Mrs. Epling."

"He 's the very man!" exclaimed Page. "I 'll ask Mrs. Sibold to take me to Manson to see him to-morrow."

She said good-by to Jimps, and walked thoughtfully toward the shanty.

"No!" she said to herself, very decidedly. "Mr. Sheringham is n't a mean man. He seems —seems shut up in himself, like a prison. Because his own son is dead, he ought to feel sorrier for other children and want to help Brat. I wish something could make him do it; make him want to do it, I mean. I wonder if it can?"

CHAPTER X

"MRS. SIBOLD," Page said suddenly. "I want to go to Manson to-morrow."

The three of them—Mr. Sibold with his pipe, Mrs. Sibold with her knitting, Page with an unopened book—were sitting on the porch. The sun had set. The western sky was a lucid, serene, glowing pale gold that filled the air with a clear radiance and made itself felt rather as an inspiring moral quality than as mere beauty of color.

"I want, please, to go to Manson," Page repeated.

"Well," Mrs. Sibold responded placidly, "we can take the roan mare and drive down there. Can't we, Jefsey?"

"Of course, if that 's what Page is wanting. But I thought you were going with me to the sawmill; eh, Page?"

"I can't wait another day to do something for that child, poor Brat," Page said vehe-

mently. "It 's too terrible for him to be shut up in that black-dark cabin. I want to go to Dr. Wayne and see if he can't get him away from those awful Pooles."

Mr. Sibold's soft, putty-colored face went together in wrinkles.

"Heaven save us! It 'll make Pooles mad to bother them about that child, and they might pay back with an ill turn to us. You leave them be, my dear."

"I 'm awfully afraid of the Pooles," Page confessed. "But, Mr. Sibold, we can't let a wicked, cruel thing like this go on just because we 're afraid for ourselves. We 've got to do something to make things better."

"I don't mix in what ain't my business," said Mr. Sibold. "I ain't going to stir up ill will, to put a torch to my goods or a bullet through my head. Uncle Sam 's trusting me to look after his post-office, and I 've got to take care of myself. Come to think of it, Lotta, I don't see how you can get to Manson to-morrow. I 've got to go to the sawmill, and you need be here to mind the store."

"But you shut it up whenever you want to.

You did yesterday; and you have done it times and times before,'' urged Page.

''I don't see how you can go,'' said Mr. Sibold.

His wife chimed in: ''I don't see as we can, Pagie. I 'll take you gallivantin' to the lake, or anywhere you choose, to-morrow evening.''

But Page was intent on her plan. The Sibolds finally yielded to her coaxings and agreed to let her take the roan mare and the buggy and go to Manson with Jimps Farlan as her escort. She had to promise, however, that she would ask Dr. Wayne to take entire charge of the matter and not to mention her name or the Sibolds'.

The next morning she started on her journey, and about noon she halted the rickety old buggy at Dr. Wayne's door.

The doctor was not at home, but his wife came out with a face that was in itself a welcome. Mrs. Wayne was a plump, pretty little woman with merry dark eyes, a mass of curly dark hair, and dimples in her rosy cheeks. She had an adorable lisp, too slight for the definiteness of print, that made Page think she kissed her

words before she let them go. Two lovely children, a girl of six and a three-year-old boy, were clinging to her skirts.

Mrs. Wayne offered Page the hospitality of the shady porch and a cool drink and a fan—all welcome, for the valley was oppressive after the sweet high air of the mountain-top.

Jimps refused to come indoors, and threw himself down under a tree.

"Lawzee! I 'm a-sweatin'!" he exclaimed.

The Wayne's noble collie looked disdainfully at the ragged, dirty boy and started toward him, bristling and growling. But five minutes later boy and dog were playing together in the friendliest fashion, while Page was pouring out her tale to Mrs. Wayne.

"Indeed my husband will help you," said the little lady. "He is always glad to help a child. He says you can't do much with the older people, but we must look out for the children and give them a chance."

"The Sibolds are so good and so kind. I don't see how they can be so—so not willing to help," said Page.

"Many people are that way," answered Mrs.

Wayne. "They say it is none of their business. And, indeed, it is difficult, sometimes dangerous, to get a child from a place like that. People like the Pooles will shoot you on the spur of the minute; or they will burn your house or kill your horse or cow—or you—a year later. You never know what they will do, or when. So the Sibolds and others are afraid."

"But Dr. Wayne is n't?"

"Oh! Joseph!" The lisping kiss lingered on the name. "If Joseph thinks he ought to do a thing, that settles it. And he feels it 's his duty to work with the Home Society. You see, it has a legal right to take children from places where they are brought up in ignorance and crime. But it can not do things offhand, by itself. It must work through and with local law officers, and it needs the financial and moral support of good citizens. Joseph helps it because he would like to see every child as sheltered and well-cared-for as his own." She glanced fondly toward her children, and then exclaimed in surprise: "Why, my darlings! Laura! Joey! What are you doing?"

She had to call again before she received an

answer from the children who were hanging over Jimps, watching him with eager interest.

Then Joey explained: "Thith boy is catching honey-beeth. He holdth them in hith handth."

"They say 'Buzz! buzz! buzz!' and then he lets them go," added Laura.

"Bees! O my dears! Come away. They 'll sting you," cried Mrs. Wayne.

"Oh, no!" Page assured her. "Nothing ever hurts Jimps. And he 'll take care of Laura and Joey."

Mrs. Wayne gave uneasy glances at the trio —or quartet, for Sandy was lying with his muzzle on Jimps's shoulder; then she turned back to Page and answered her questions about the Home Society.

"But, Mrs. Wayne," Page said presently, "that society can't take all the children. Why, there are the Farlans—Jimps and Minta and Nance and Looey and Sam and Danny. You can't take all the children of all these families and get them adopted or put in asylums, can you? And if you could, how terribly they would miss their mountains!" She glanced at Jimps.

"No," Mrs. Wayne said, and then she repeated emphatically: "No. We must bring help to the homes; we must train and educate the children who, after all, are the missionaries that can do most with the fathers and mothers. Joseph says— Oh! there he comes."

Dr. Wayne was a clever, alert, overworked man with kind eyes and a firm, fearless mouth. His weariness and depression dropped away when his wife went to meet him and the children ran, with cries of "Fardy! Fardy!" to hug his legs and cling to his hands.

His wife explained Page's errand, and he sat down, with Laura and Joey on his knees, and listened with interest to her story.

"Thank you for coming to me," he said heartily. "We 'll take the matter up at once with the proper authorities. I am glad you are getting the help we need in this work."

"As soon as I heard about you, I knew you were the person to come to," said Page.

Dr. Wayne laughed. "I don't mean myself," he said. "The interest and the sense of responsibility of the people of a community must be aroused if the Home Society is to

carry on its rescue work efficiently. Now, you seem to have enlisted the sympathy and help of a mountain neighbor." He pointed to Jimps Farlan.

"Oh! Jimps does want to help Brat now," Page replied, "but it is n't because I persuaded him. He did n't pay a particle of attention to anything I said. He went with me yesterday, not because he pitied Brat, but because he wanted to spite the Pooles. But he worked pretty hard to give the child some things we carried to it. He stayed there after I ran away, and he got hurt. Now he 's keen to help Brat."

"That is the way people are drawn into widening circles of human relationships, by doing and suffering for others," said Dr. Wayne. "The more you help, the more you want to help."

"That certainly is the way with Jimps," agreed Page.

"It is the way with us all," said Dr. Wayne. "Well, you have come at the right time. We are expecting Mr. Truitt, the officer of the Home Society, to carry some children from the

county poorhouse to the society headquarters next week. We will make investigations about this boy and try to get him in time to go with the others. If the child were the Pooles' very own, the Home Society could take him from confinement in that den. But since the mother left him at the poorhouse and these people took him from the county authorities, the case is simpler. I will telephone now to the poorhouse superintendent. When did the Pooles get the child?"

Page put the question to Jimps.

"Sure I know," he said. "Bill an' Marthy was to the porehouse the winter Looey was a baby. Brat 's older 'n her."

"How old is she now?" asked Dr. Wayne.

"Thar 's Sam next, an' he 's a good-size chap; he was our baby 'long with Grief. An' then thar 's Danny, an' this is the second huckle-berryin' since he was borned."

Dr. Wayne was familiar with this mountain method of counting ages.

"That makes the child—let me see—about eight years old. And what is his name?"

"Brat."

"That is n't any name," said Dr. Wayne; "not any more than 'Baby' or 'Boy.' "

"That 's all the name he 's got," replied Jimps. "He 's Janey Walker's Brat."

"We 'll see what we can find out," said Dr. Wayne.

He went to the telephone and questioned the superintendent of the county poorhouse. The man said that a woman named Janey Walker had been there a few years before; she went away and left her baby. Bill and Marthy Poole were there at the same time, and they might have carried the child home with them. He believed they did. No, he had not made any effort to get it back; there were enough squalling babies around the place. The Pooles might not be proper persons to rear it, he admitted in answer to Dr. Wayne's rebuke, but there was no use bothering about a child like that.

" 'No use bothering'!" the doctor said wrathfully. "People 'are afraid of stirring up bad blood' and 'don't want to get mixed up in a quarrel.' And so, instead of helping the world go on to better things, they are stumbling

stones in its way." He turned back to the telephone. "What 's that?" He listened a while, made a few comments, and hung up the receiver.

"Here 's the kind of thing we come across over and over again," he said. "The Poole woman has been applying to the superintendent, off and on, for help in supporting the child that she took. Two or three years ago, she said the child was sick and asked for money to buy medicine. Instead of money he gave her an order for the medicine, which she tried to trade at the drug-store for tobacco. A little later she told him the child was dead and she wanted money to buy a coffin. And that fall she came back and begged for clothes for him, brazenly acknowledging that the tale about his death was just a ruse to get money! Well, we have enough information to justify our taking action. I am going to New Canaan,"—the county town, three miles away, —"and I 'll see Superintendent Hinton and we 'll get a warrant sworn out and instruct the sheriff to ride over and get the child to-morrow or next day."

Page breathed a sigh of relief. "So that 's settled. Brat will be taken away from those brutes."

"Yes. I am sure the county authorities will act. We 'll put their duty under their noses where they can't help seeing it."

"Oh! I hope," Page said fervently, "the Home Society people will be good to the poor little fellow."

"They will."

"They 'll not get out of patience with him because he is shy and scary and—queer?"

"They are very patient and wise," the doctor answered. "And as soon as possible they 'll find him a good home. Look here!" He turned to Jimps. "Do you know whether that child 's been hurt; had a bad blow?"

"Pooles is mean enough to beat him up," the boy said confidently.

"H'm!" The doctor remembered that Jimps was a Farlan, and took this statement with many grains of salt. "Well, Miss Page, you may be sure the Home Society people will do all that 's possible for him. I think from what you say that he needs medical treatment,

perhaps an operation. Ah! how those famous busy doctors give their time and their best skill to these little waifs! I wish you could meet Mr. Truitt, who will have charge of the child. Can't you come back on Tuesday, when he will be here?"

"I don't know," Page said doubtfully. "I 'd love to."

"Well, do. Get the mail rider to bring you down with him in the morning and I 'll take you back in the afternoon."

"Oh! surely I can do that," she said. "Thank you, Dr. Wayne. Oh! I am so glad, *so* glad Brat 's going to be taken from that awful place."

Having thus arranged matters, Page and Jimps drove up the mountain. But while they were rejoicing that the child would soon be rescued, the Pooles, although ignorant of the plan, were taking steps to render its fulfilment impossible.

The huckleberry crop in Rocky Hollow was very scant that year, and Bill and Marthy Poole resolved to go to Bent Mountain, where berries were said to be plentiful, and pick and

dry a supply for winter use. The trip was to be a prolonged picnic; they would camp out and spend a week or ten days getting berries. Of course they would take Brat with them; and Marthy's sister, Dell Martin, and her two children, ten-year-old Gabe and Molly who was thirteen, were to join the party.

The Pooles were still mystified about the invasion of their cabin. It must have been, they said to themselves, some trick of revenue officers; no one wanted Brat. They said this over and over, with a queer sort of uneasiness. Now they were glad to leave home for a while and give things a chance to "settle down."

Their preparations for the berrying expedition were soon made. A frying-pan, a tin bucket, a small bag of meal, a piece of meat, and some coffee and salt were dumped into a bag that Marthy slung over her shoulder. Bill put a package of tobacco into his pocket, took his gun, and whistled to his dog. The party went up Rocky Hollow along a path that came out on the road which led to Bent Mountain.

And so, on Monday morning, when the sheriff and his deputy went to the Poole cabin, they

found it empty. Sheriff Price would have been quite willing to let the Pooles—like Boozer Sam Sawyer and Pappy Gooch—go scot-free; but Dr. Wayne and the Home Society were behind this quest for the child, and the sheriff knew from experience that they would not give up until Brat was rescued. So he rode back to Butterfly Flat, and there he met the mail rider, who on his rural routes takes the place of the old town crier. The sheriff knew that Mr. Smith could probably give information about the Pooles, but that more than probably he would not give it if it were inquired for directly and officially; few mountaineers are willing to give information against any one who has not injured them personally.

So Mr. Price hailed the mail rider jovially: "Hey, Smith! How 's times? An' who 've you seen this mornin' you like better 'n yoreself?"

Mr. Smith guffawed. "Nobody. I ain't met nobody a-tall but Mr. Charles seekin' sawmill hands, an' Pooles an' Martins goin' huckleberryin'. You lookin' for anybody?"

"Uh, I 'm just ridin' round for my health!

I 've heard say the berry crop is short this year, an' folks have to go a far way to find 'em."

"Yes. Pooles was goin' to Bent Mountain. I told 'em a passel o' folks was thar all last week. So they 'lowed they 'd go to Cloyd."

"You don't say! Cloyd County over in West Virginia! What 's the world comin' to, when folks's got to go eight miles an' out thar own State for a turn o' huckleberries? Well, I must be goin'."

Hoping to overtake the Pooles, the officers rode rapidly; but when they came to Lost Creek they saw the huckleberrying party climbing the hill on the other side of the stream. That was in West Virginia, and of course out of their jurisdiction.

Jimps had followed gleefully, to see the rescue of the child and the discomfiture of his enemies; now he went back crestfallen to inform Page that the Pooles had escaped.

She was greatly disappointed and distressed. If Brat were not at Manson when Mr. Truitt came, there might be delay and difficulty in getting him to the Home Society. The Pooles

might find out the plan and prevent the rescue.

"Sure," said Jimps. He was silent a minute. " 'S all right for Dr. Wayne to git him," he said, with a frown; "but what business is outsiders got to come here an' take folks?"

"The Home Society takes a child for its own good, to give it a home and a living chance," Page replied. "You know the Pooles ought not to have Brat."

"Naw. He don't belong to them. But I wisht we could git him, 'stead o' them outside strangers."

"But, Jimps, even if we had a right to take the child, we could n't keep him always in a pen at that old sawmill."

"I wisht the logs wa' n't so fur apart at our house," said Jimps. "I wisht we could have him thar, to live with us." He gave a sudden little laugh. "Ain't it funny? That little fool minds me o' Grief."

"Of Grief!" exclaimed Page.

"It 's when I don't see him; when I look at him an' then away," Jimps said, with a frown.

"But Grief was very different; and much younger, was n't he?" asked Page.

"Um-h'm. Pooles brung Brat from the porehouse 'fore Aunt Nance come home. Looey was our baby then. An' Grief was of a age with Sam. I reckon," Jimps tried to puzzle out the matter, "it 's 'cause they 're so diff'rent I think o' Grief."

"Yes," Page agreed thoughtfully. "That 's why this poor, forlorn, pitiful little fellow makes you think of that happy, lovely child. Oh! if only we could get him! I do wish we knew where the Pooles are and how long they are going to stay."

"I c'n follow 'em an' fox round an' find out what they 're goin' to do," said Jimps. "I 'd sort o' like to see Brat. An' it 's a mighty good outdoors mornin'."

It was indeed a lovely morning; not a sparkling jewel of a day, but fair and serene, like one of a string of pearls—the sort of weather that early September often gives to the Virginia mountains.

Jimps started forth blithely, coursing his way to the north-west through the forest so as to come out at Lost Creek Ford, where the sheriff had seen the Pooles. With only eight or ten

miles to travel and with the day before him, there was no need for haste.

He strolled along, humming quaint old tunes and filling the forgotten places with melodious murmurs. He stopped to feast on wild grapes, and he crushed bunches in his fingers, then waved his hands to spread abroad their wild-wood aroma. He paused to watch, with a comradely smile, the journeyings of a chipmunk. He darted along, the very spirit of mirth, leaving behind him a trail of rippling laughter; he ran races with his shadow; he caught birch or hemlock boughs and took flying leaps, skimming along half in the air, as if he were something more than an earth-bound creature.

He had often gone lightly and gaily through the woods, but never before had he frolicked along so blissfully. This was no aimless merry wandering; he had a goal, and that goal was the welfare of a helpless child.

After a while Jimps heard a pleasant murmur, and presently he came to a rivulet that threaded its way through the woodland, loitering in pools, rippling over rapids, plashing over tiny falls. He paused to dabble his feet

in the stream, and a junco hopped near him, uttering plaintive cries.

"You little fool!" laughed Jimps. "I wa'n't thinkin' 'bout yore nest, an' here you come tellin' me it 's nigh."

He looked around and found it, on a mossy bank behind a tiny hemlock. There were four birdlings in it, and he teased them for a while by putting his finger-tip on their gaping beaks; and then he amused himself by feeding them with insects and berries. At first the mother bird flitted around, chirruping wildly and making frenzied efforts to distract him; but presently she ceased her cries and alighted on a near-by twig. Jimps nodded at her.

"I 'll make you come nigher, little mammy," he said. "I mought as well rest a while 'fore I git tired. Thar ain't no hurry."

He stretched himself flat on the ground, with his right hand near the nest. The junco hopped forward, then back two or three times; but every time she came nearer and stood her ground more boldly. At last she gave a little flirting jump, as if she would pass Jimps's hand and enter her nest. He moved his hand quickly,

and she alighted on his thumb, and stood there trembling, with her wings half-raised to flit away. Jimps chirruped gently, and she stood still, with her head on one side and her beadlike eyes fixed on his face. He chirped again. She gave an answering *cheep!* and he put up his hand and stroked her plumage.

"Ef Brat was here," he murmured, "I could git him to stop bein' skeered."

There was a little silence. A squirrel, coming to drink at the stream, ran unaffrighted across Jimps's outstretched arm and went off, chattering to its mate. The forest was very wide and sweet and still. An open space in the green-gold chestnut foliage showed the sky, deep blue, with lazy little clouds loitering about or melting in the misty depths. Breezes woke and whispered, and then fell asleep.

From afar there came the high, sweet note of the wood-thrush.

And then there came another sound, a sinister and ominous sound, the slow, low rattling of a crawling rattlesnake. Jimps sprang up, trembling and blanched with fear. The yellow, diamond-patterned body of the reptile glit-

tered in a patch of sunlight hardly four feet away. The junco uttered a faint chirp and hopped to one side, to lure away the snake which was advancing toward her nest. It stopped. It lay stretched at full length, with its head lifted and waving gently to and fro, and its eyes fixed on the bird. She made as if she would flutter away, but her raised wings flopped helplessly to her sides. She uttered a faint *cheep! cheep!* and stood still. There was a quick forward flash; the cruel jaws opened and then closed, destroying what only a moment before had been a swift flight, a sweet song, a loving mother heart.

Jimps stood as pale as a corpse, and shivering with fear and loathing, while the deadly work went on. It was not until the snake stretched itself on the sunny rock where he had just been playing with the bird that he seemed able to withdraw his fascinated, terrified eyes. Then he groped down, picked up a stone, and threw it, but without his usual sure skill; it clattered harmlessly on the rock beside the snake which coiled and struck viciously.

At the sound of its menacing rattle, Jimps

shuddered violently and took two or three stumbling steps.

Having, it seemed, recovered his lost power of motion, he went away, glancing over his shoulder every minute or two to make sure that he was not pursued.

"I hate rattlers!" he said vehemently. "Ugh! I hate 'em! They spile the world!"

He went far through the woods before the color came back to his face and he again walked swiftly and surely. He came to the highway, and followed it a while; then he turned off on a right-hand road that led presently to a ford.

He crossed Lost Creek and entered a fertile, narrow valley. Before him lay orchard and meadow-land, cultivated fields, and a little farm-house. Jimps paused and looked longingly at the door of a whitewashed spring-house that was fastened only by a string looped over a nail; but he passed it without helping himself to its stores of butter and milk, and went on toward the dwelling.

The path led to a little back porch festooned with hop-vines. Sitting on the porch and thumping away at an old-fashioned churn was

a stout, motherly-looking woman in a blue-and-white gingham dress. As she jerked the churn dasher up and down, she sang zealously:

"Oh! what ship is this that will take us all home?
Oh, glory hallelujah!
'T is the old ship of Zion, hallelujah!
'T is the old ship of Zion, hallelujah!"

The thin, nasal voice soared high and the dasher went up to the top and down to the bottom of the churn:

"Do you think she will be able to take us all home?
Oh, glory hallelujah!
Yes, I know she will be able, hallelujah!
Yes, I know she will be able, hallelujah!

"She has landed many thousands and will land as many more,
Oh, glory hallelujah!
She has landed them in heaven, hallelujah!
She has landed them in heaven, hallelujah!"

Jimps gave a grunt of greeting, and the woman started and looked around.

"Uh, boy! you skeered me," she said, "com-

in' up so still an' mouselike. Who are you? You want to see Mr. Rowzey? He won 't be home till supper-time."

"Did some huckleberriers come this way this mornin'?" asked Jimps.

"Yes. My old man seen 'em," answered Mrs. Rowzey. "They was aimin' to go over on Mill Mountain."

"Whar 's that?"

"They ain't gone thar," said the woman. "Tom told 'em a gang o' folks camped thar last week an' did n't leave a berry. They axed whar berries was round here, an' Tom told 'em, jokin'-like, he didn't know no place but Rattlesnake Mountain. An' the man cussed an' said he 'd go thar."

"To Rattlesnake Mountain!" gasped Jimps.

The fame and the fear of that reptile-infested place had gone abroad through all the surrounding country.

Mrs. Rowzey nodded. "Ain't they the fools?" she said. "Most folks would do 'thout huckleberries all thar lives ruther 'n go thar."

"You reckon that mountain 's bad as folks say?" asked Jimps.

"They could n't say it was worse 'n 't is," she answered. "I ain't nuver been so cravin' for huckleberries that I 've been thar. But my old man went onct when he was a boy an' experimentin', an' he says thar ain't money in the world to tempt him to go back. The mountain—it 's jest a helter-skelter mess o' rocks overgrowed with scrub-oak and huckleberries—it 's alive with rattlers, yellow and black, all sizes from little shiny ones to big old rusty fellows. They crawl round in them berry-bushes an' lay out sunnin' on them rocks. An' ef you go thar, they stand up an' fight you like a man."

Jimps's face grew white and his eyes wide with terror.

"Them folks, them Pooles, sure they ain't sich fools to go thar," he cried desperately.

"They did so. My old man seen them go 'cross the mountain. They was aimin' to camp in a old cabin on the fur side. Tom said the man in the gang was Bill Poole."

"Yes," Jimps answered faintly.

"H'm! Them Pooles is owdacious folks. My daddy, Gabriel Reece he was, was in the

war they call the Civilized War with Bill's daddy,'' Mrs. Rowzey gossiped along comfortably. ''I 've heared daddy say, in the fightin' at Petersburg, they was in a ditch with a apple-tree in front. An' Yankee bullets come so thick they whacked off apples, like a man shakin' the tree. Presently daddy heard the cap'n yell, 'Go back, you fool!'—an' thar was old Bill Poole done got out the ditch an' was fillin' his pockets with apples fast as the bullets cut 'em off. That 's the kind o' folks them Pooles is; no stomach for work, but plenty for victuals, an' not afeared o' nothin'. Is Bill kin of your 'n?''

''No.''

''Well, ef I was you, I would n't follow him to no sich place as Rattlesnake Mountain. I 'd leave my business wait till they come back. You don't look peart noway. You 're real pale round the gills. Here! let me give you a swallow o' fresh buttermilk; I got more 'n the pigs want. An' I reckon I c'n find you a piece o' bread.''

Jimps sat down on the step and ate the food, but it had little savor. He was thinking of

the snake that caught the bird. One snake was enough to fill a day and the woods with misery and terror. And a whole mountain full of them!

"I bet pore little Brat is skeered 'most to death," he thought; and then he asked, "Was thar—did they have any chillen along?"

"A gal an' a boy big enough to pick berries, an' a little chap awful peaked an' pitiful-looking. 'T was a shame to take him along with 'em to sich a place."

Jimps put down the cup and got up slowly.

"I must be goin'," he said.

He went down the path, and, stopping at the road, looked first at the peaceful chestnut woods on the other side of Lost Creek and then at the scrubby, rocky heights of Rattlesnake Mountain.

CHAPTER XI

JIMPS stood a while at the parting of the ways, then he turned back toward the ford. "Pore Brat!" he said. "Ef 't was b'ars or bobcats, anything but rattlers, I 'd go thar. But rattlers! Lawzee, naw!"

And then he tried to put Brat out of his mind. He turned into a field and strolled along, running his parted fingers through clumps of daisies and snipping off the blossoms. He swung up into an apple-tree and filled his pockets with fruit. A bough struck his cheek on the place that had been hurt when he fell at the Poole cabin, and he winced and frowned.

"Drat them Pooles!" he said. "They 're mean folks. An' lawzee! Brat has a tough time, shet up in that hole. I don't reckon he nuver had a big red apple like this."

He sprang out of the tree and went his way, but more slowly now. Once or twice he stopped and looked back. Presently he heard some one

approaching, and, not wishing Mr. Rowzey to meet him with stolen fruit, he hid behind some bushes. But the man was not Mr. Rowzey. It was Bill Poole's nephew, Gaycy Poole.

"Seems like all the Pooles is comin' to Rattlesnake Mountain," Jimps growled to himself. "Wisht the rattlers would bite 'em ev'y one. Specially Gaycy. He 's a tough rascal. I seen him onct give his little buddy a back-handed, knockdown lick jest for pure meanness. No tellin' what he 'll do to Brat."

Gaycy Poole went swinging up the road, and Jimps came from behind the bushes. For a moment he stood still; then, very slowly, as if something stronger than his unwilling, terrified self were compelling him, he turned his back to the ford and went up the road, with his face toward Rattlesnake Mountain. His lips were white and quivering. His breath stopped and then came in jerks and gasps.

"I 'm awful skeered," he said miserably. "But I got to go an' see 'bout pore little Brat. I bet they left him in the shack that old woman was tellin' 'bout, whiles they're huckleberryin'. Ef I c'n git him, I c'n tote him—he ain't no

more weight 'n a bag o' leaves—an' wade down the creek an' zip through the woods an' take him to Dr. Wayne. But I—I don't durst go thar, with them snakes squirmin' an' skirmishin' round!"

Jimps crouched in a fence-corner and waited while Gaycy Poole went to the farm-house. In a few minutes the young man came back and proceeded briskly toward Rattlesnake Mountain. Jimps took the path at a cautious distance behind him. Thus they went up the little valley, crossed the gentle slope of Mill Mountain, and came to the foot of the rocky, ragged knoll beyond it. Gaycy stopped and cut a stout stick, and with this he beat the bushes as he advanced.

"An' he 's got on boots, too," said Jimps, looking with a frown at his own bare feet.

He picked up a handful of stones and went on, stepping carefully in open places. Sometimes, indeed, the scrub-oak and huckleberry-bushes were so thick that he could not choose clear places for his feet. Then, holding his breath, he would plunge forward, as one who can not swim takes a push into water of

unknown depth. Seeing now the ashy pallor of his face, his eyes wide and glazed with terror, his brow beaded with cold sweat, his breath coming in short, irregular gasps through parted lips, one would not have known him as the carefree, joyous forest creature of the morning.

At the top of the mountain he paused. To his right, in a grassy glade beside a stream, was a tumble-down cabin. Far down on the southern slope, figures were stooping and rising—the Pooles and Martins gathering berries. He saw Gaycy Poole stop a minute at the cabin and then go on toward the berry-pickers.

Jimps turned toward the cabin. He went a little way down the rocky ledge and then came to a tangle of scrub-oak. Choosing a place where he glimpsed an opening ahead, he plunged into the thicket. Suddenly he stopped, paralyzed with terror. The rock before him seemed alive with rattlesnakes. Among the broken stones there was—it might be six, it might be sixty—a mass of squirming creatures; and on a flat rock above them one huge reptile lay stretched at full length.

In the second that Jimps stood there, he saw

the junco being destroyed, his father sitting numb under the "charm," little Mandy screeching away her tortured life. And the rattlesnake that did all these horrible things was—the reptile lying before him; and he was the junco, his father, little Mandy.

The snake raised its head and waved it gently up and down. Jimps felt that if he stood there a second longer he should never move again. With the courage of desperation, he raised his hand and cast a stone. It struck the rattler squarely, and sent it writhing to the rocky den below, where the others instantly coiled and rattled.

As the snake left the ledge, Jimps's foot touched it—for only a second, to make a flying leap into the thicket beyond. On he sped in mad terror, feeling as if the ground beneath him were squirming and coiling, as if the bushes around him were hissing and rattling. He came at last to the glade and he dropped down on the safe, open ground.

How long he lay there he did not know. The first thing of which he was conscious was a little voice saying: "Pretty! pretty! pretty!"

Jimps lay still, with his eyes shut.

"Pretty!" prattled the little voice.

Jimps sat up and looked dully around him. It was indeed a gay, smiling little glade. The wild grasses were topped with white and gold and lavender,—yarrow, daisies, goldenrod, St.-John's-wort, bergamot,—and myriads of blue and yellow and copper-colored butterflies, like winged blossoms, were flitting around in the sunshine. A little stream went rippling alongside the meadow at the foot of a chestnut-wooded mountain. The only blot on the loveliness was the old cabin in the middle of the glade, a mere hut, without window or chimney, with a broken door propped shut by a pole on the outside.

Jimps gave a little sigh of relief and lay down again, soothed by the gay and delicate color, the warm sunshine, the wafted freshness and fragrance.

"Pretty! pretty!" still came the sweet, crooning voice from inside the cabin.

At last Jimps got up and crept to the cabin and looked between the logs. Brat was sitting on the ground—there was no other floor—gaz-

ing through a crack at the bright, unfamiliar scene outside.

"Pret—" The child's babbling ceased abruptly as a bit of bark came off under Jimps's hand and fell inside the cabin. Brat looked around and, seeing the figure outside, he staggered to the opposite side of the room and crouched against a log, with his face hidden in his hands.

"Lawzee! he 's skeery," thought Jimps. "Ef I grab him to tote him off, he 'll kick an' squeal, an' I 'll git kotch up with. I bet I could tame him. Thar ain't no wild thing I can't friend with, gi' me time. But thar ain't much time. Come sundown, Pooles 'll be back. An' I got to find a roundabout way home, followin' that branch down to Lost Creek. I can't risk goin' back 'cross that mountain." He shuddered.

He stood still a minute; then he slipped the prop from the door and quietly entered the cabin. Without seeming to notice Brat, he sat down and began to hum in a low, monotonous tone.

The child started and looked around.

Jimps sat still, humming softly. Presently he took two apples out of his pocket and began to eat one. He rolled the other toward Brat, and it lay, very red and shiny and tempting, in a patch of sunlight half-way between them.

Brat sat a while, looking at Jimps with dull vacant eyes, and then began a halting journey toward the apple. A catbird gave a sudden querulous cry, and he jumped and scurried back to the farthest corner of the cabin. After a while he started again toward the shining fruit. After many pauses and several retreats, he came near enough to extend a thin, hesitating finger and touch it. He picked up the apple, which he patted and fondled against his cheek. Finally he began to eat it.

Jimps put out one hand and gently touched the child. Brat quivered and seemed about to flee; but after a breathless moment he sat still. With soothing murmurs, Jimps stroked his arms and his body. At first the child flinched at every touch; then he accepted the caresses without protest. But, when he had finished the apple, he got up and started away, as if frightened by his own brief courage.

Very gently but very firmly, with little soft soothing murmurs, Jimps picked him up and held him in his arms. Brat shivered, but did not try to escape. He sat breathlessly still for a while. Presently he gave a long, relaxed breath and cuddled down in the encircling arms; and then—his first movement toward Jimps—he touched his cheek with soft, curious, hesitating little fingers.

"Pore Brat!" Jimps spoke very slowly and gently, with pauses that were filled with soft hums and murmurs. "Don't you want—h'm-m-m-m!—to go 'way with me—h'm-m-m!—out in the pretty sunshine?"

The child snuggled a little closer. He gave a fleeting glance of interest, almost affection. For a second his eyes were like those of a dog when he looks at his master and a groping, caged spirit seems to beat against bars that shut him away from human kinship. It was for but a second. Before Jimps saw, even if he could have understood the look, Brat's face was again vacant and his eyes were dull and dim-visioned. He pressed his forehead with the familiar gesture of pain.

"They tell Brat stay in," he faltered.

"We 'll go whar they can't find us," said Jimps; "whar it 's good an' sunny, an' trees is full o' red apples."

"Give Brat apples; two apples."

"I 'll give you apples an' apples an' apples," said Jimps. "Come an' let 's git 'em."

"M-m-m!" agreed the child.

They went to the door, and Jimps looked out. He gave merely a casual, careless glance, not expecting to see any one; for he felt sure the Pooles would pick berries till sundown. But no! There they were in full view, coming rapidly across the meadow toward the cabin. Bill and Marthy and Gaycy Poole were in front; behind them was Dell Martin, with Gabe and Molly.

"Gosh! I 'm a goner!" exclaimed Jimps.

His first impulse was to make a dash for liberty. But, even if he could outrun the gang, he would not be able to escape, for Bill had a gun and would not hesitate to use it. If he could crawl between the logs at the back of the cabin— But the cracks were too narrow. He gave a despairing glance around, then clambered up the log wall, caught a joist-pole, and

swung himself into the loft. It was merely some boards laid across the poles, where a few armfuls of hay had been left, but it was the one possible hiding-place, his only chance of safety.

"Don't tell whar I am," he said to Brat, in an urgent undertone. "They 'll kill me."

Frightened by Jimps's excitement, the child shrank away without answering, and stared around with wild, vacant eyes.

Then, for the rough voices were at the very door, Jimps burrowed down in the hay and lay as still as a couching rabbit.

"You Gaycy!" Bill Poole was saying, "you moved the prop off 'n the door an' ain't put it back."

"No sich thing. I propped it like I found it."

"Thar 't is to show for itself," said Marthy shrilly. "An' ef that Brat had got out an' roamed off an'—"

"You sure he was seekin' me?"

Bill Poole's voice sounded so near that Jimps raised his head and peered down cautiously. His heart gave a great thump and then stood

still. Not four feet from him was a sinewy hand covered with shaggy black hair. It was Bill Poole's hand, and it held a gun. The hand moved along and rested on a joist-pole, with the muzzle of the gun pointed straight at the crouching boy. Had Bill seen him enter the cabin; and, divining his hiding place, was he about to shoot? No. Even as Jimps felt sure this was the case, the hand was withdrawn, leaving the gun on the joist-poles, out of reach of the children.

The shuffling steps went to and fro below, and then Jimps's nostrils were comforted by tobacco smoke. Certainly, if the Pooles suspected his presence, they would not be settling themselves quietly with their pipes.

"I know it 's so," Gaycy was saying. "I seen Jim Woods, an' he say he met the sheriff what had been to yore house. Jim got word he went to git that Brat."

"Huh!" Bill snorted. "That was jest a blind to git me for that moonshine business. Who 'd seek Brat?" There was a queer suspicion and alarm in his voice.

"The officers followed you smang to the State

line,'' said Gaycy; ''an' they 're jest waitin' for you to come back.''

Bill ripped out an oath. ''That Farlan pup told on me,'' he said. ''I wisht I 'd come in the open when him an' that gal spied on the still. I 'd 'a' made end o' him then an' thar. Pap an' Sam ought to 'a' shot 'em both. It would 'a' saved a heap o' trouble.''

''Hit 's two weeks too late to talk 'bout that,'' remarked Gaycy. ''What you goin' to do now?''

''Do?'' Bill sent forth a volley of oaths. ''I 'm goin' back to clean up the Farlan gang with guns an' fire. Then I 'm goin' to hit the trail to West Virginia.''

''Good!'' exclaimed Gaycy. ''That 's what I 've been wantin' to do sence I was big enough to tote a gun.''

''I c'n shoot a Farlan,'' said Gabe Martin. He had a little lisp that made his sweet young voice sound almost babyish. ''I shot a wabbit, an' I c'n shoot a Farlan thest as good.''

''I 'll holp,'' Molly said eagerly. ''I c'n load guns an' tote news.''

''We 'll git all our folks,'' said Bill. ''We 'll

clean out the Farlan tribe while we 're on the job."

Marthy Poole knocked the ashes out of her corncob pipe.

"My edvice is to do it," she said decisively, "an' not to waste time talkin'. With Sheriff after you, you 've got no time to tarry, Bill."

"I ain't goin' to. Well, I ain't grievin' 'bout givin' up this here berryin'. I don't like the way them rattlers fit to-day, an' they 're too dog-gone thick hereabouts. Hurry up, Marthy, an' cook us some victuals. Then we 'll lay down an' take a nap, an' we 'll up an' out from this place. We 'll shoot up that tribe an' light out to West Virginia to-morrow night."

"Hit 's a good time," said Gaycy. "To-morrow 's court day, an' ev'ybody 'll be down at the court-house. We c'n—"

The men went on discussing their plans, while Jimps lay still and listened. Presently they stopped talking and sat still, perhaps absorbed in thought, perhaps dozing.

Jimps moved a little and peeped through a crack between the logs. He could not see Bill and Gaycy, who were sitting in the doorway.

Gabe and Molly were collecting sticks for the fire that Marthy had lighted. Dell Martin had brought a bucket of water from the stream, and was making bread by the simple method of adding salt and dribbles of water to meal she had poured on a bag. She put the corn-pones in the ashes to bake, and Marthy tossed some hunks of fat meat into a frying-pan and boiled coffee in a tin bucket. The simple supper was soon prepared and eaten. Then they all came into the cabin, and Bill lighted a lantern.

Jimps lay for a while, watching the huge fantastic shadows playing on the walls; then he rolled over on his back and tried to think, to make plans. He must stay up here in the loft, where he was safe, until the Pooles went away. Then he would hurry home, dodging past them in the woods, and warn his family and his kinfolks of the planned attack. They would—

The sound of some one's scrambling up the log wall snapped his meditations short. He could not see who it was. He could only hear the scuffling feet on the logs, and see a gigantic shadow rise and approach. He lay still, frozen with terror.

"Hey! What are you doin' thar?" demanded Bill Poole's harsh voice.

"Go up; boy go up," stammered Brat.

"Naw; boy won't go up," Bill answered roughly; "jest to fall an' lame yoreself for somebody to tote home. You set still."

He pulled the child back and put him down in a corner, where he sat whimpering and muttering to himself.

"What 's the matter with that boy?" asked Gaycy. "He looks mighty cur'ous."

"Lawd knows!" said Marthy. "We 're 'bleeged to keep him shet up all the time. Half a chanct, he runs 'way, an' if he gits back an' them folks find out—" She stopped abruptly.

"Who find out what?" inquired Gaycy.

Bill cut in, with an oath: "'T was a bad day 's job botherin' with him. Best thing to do now is to give him a killin' lick on top o' his fool head. I 'll do it, next time I git bothered. Ef we 're goin' to clean up the mountains, we mought 's well start with him."

"Why n't you take him back to the porehouse?" asked Gaycy.

"Humph!" grunted Bill. After a pause he went on: "Looky-here, Gaycy. We 'll want a lot o' ca'tridges an' powder an' shot. Me an' you better go by Sibold's an' take what he 's got. Then we 'll go to court."

"You got to keep out o' Sheriff's sight," Gaycy reminded him.

Bill frowned. "But I 'll be on hand when the scrimmage comes. See here, Gayce! Them Farlans and Banes always come up the road in a bunch, court days. S'pose I hide on this side the river, an' when court crowd breaks, you git our folks over in the first ferry-boat. We 'll layway that gang an' shoot 'em up an' be gone 'fore Sheriff can git 'cross the river."

"Good work!" Gaycy agreed; then he yawned and said: "Let 's git a nap now. I b'lieve I 'll climb up thar an' tumble down that hay to sleep on."

"Naw, you won't," said Bill Poole. "These here bags is good enough for me an' plenty good for you. You ain't goin' in that loft, stirrin' up snakes. Don't you know they always ha'nt rubbish in a old house? You lay down an' go to sleep.— What 's that?"

Jimps had jumped up, rustling the dry hay. He could not have avoided starting if he had known it would bring the muzzle of Bill Poole's gun to his head.

For several minutes he had heard something, felt something, stirring at his side. He had moved cautiously, to get away from it, but suddenly, it touched his hand, and then came a sharp pain in his finger. A rattlesnake had bitten him—that was his one quick thought. He sprang up and flung out his hand. It struck a soft furry thing and sent it flying through the air. It alighted at Bill's feet, and went scurrying through a crack.

"A chipmunk!" exclaimed Gaycy. "Whoo! ain't it skeered!"

"I bet a snake was after it," said Bill. "I told you 'bout that old rubbish up thar."

Jimps's heart, which had seemed to him to stop beating, went back to its work. He lay perfectly still until he heard heavy breathing below and knew that the Pooles were asleep. Then he sat up cautiously. Could he slip down now and escape? But no! It would be foolish to make the attempt. Even if he could get

down without waking the Pooles, he would be sure to arouse the dogs, and the men would up and on him in a second. He would be no match for them, even if he took Bill Poole's gun.

Bill's gun! He could not spend the night here, eight feet from his mortal enemy armed with a loaded gun. Moving very slowly and quietly, he got the gun and took out the load. Then he replaced the weapon and stretched himself on the hay. Even while he was resolving that he would stay awake all night, for fear of making a betraying sound or movement in his sleep, his heavy eyelids fell—and then Marthy Poole was calling the men to get up.

While dawn and moonshine mingled in a pale, misty light, the Pooles left the cabin. At the last minute Brat tried to pull away from Marthy's leading hand.

"Brat don't want to go," he whined. "Brat want to stay with boy."

No one heeded his words, and, whimpering and resisting, he was dragged along.

When the voices died away in the distance, Jimps scrambled from the loft. He followed

the Pooles at a safe distance down the little valley and along Lost Creek until they crossed the ford; then he dodged past them in the woods and took a bee-line for home. The Farlans must make ready to attack the foe that expected to surprise them. What a killing it would be! He hoped they would not leave a Poole in the mountains.

"Pore Brat!" he thought. "He ain't no Poole. He 's jest a porehouse scrub. I wisht I could 'a' got him away, but now it 's too late. Lawzee! ef jest I had a gun! I 'm goin' to Butterfly Flat—'t ain't fur out o' my way—an' borrow old Sibold's gun 'fore Pooles git thar. I c'n slip it back to-morrow, 'fore he misses it. I 'll have a gun after the fightin'. I hope I c'n git Bill Poole's; hit 's a mighty straight-shootin' weepon."

He hurried to Butterfly Flat and peeped into the window of the back room. There was the gun-rack—empty! He had counted so positively on getting the weapon that he stood for a minute motionless with disappointment and vexation. Where was the gun? If there were any chance of getting it—

He heard Page's voice, and, going around the corner of the house, he saw her sitting in the hammock, with her hat on her lap. She was waiting for the mail rider, with whom she was to go to Manson to see Dr. Wayne and Mr. Truitt. Sitting beside her was her cousin, Harrison Ruffin, who had just returned from his hike.

A sudden thought came to Jimps Farlan. These outsiders might get Brat and take him to Dr. Wayne. He would ask them to do it. But first—

"Whar 's Mr. Sibold?" he demanded.

Page started up. "Why, Jimps!" she exclaimed. "I did n't hear you coming. Did—"

"Whar 's Mr. Sibold?" he repeated.

"Gone to the mill. Do you—"

"How come he took his gun to mill?" interrupted Jimps.

"How do you know he took it?" asked Page. "He said he was going to bring home some squirrels for a stew. Jimps, what is the matter?"

"Nothin'."

"But there is something. I know there is!

You look so wild and excited. What is it?"

After all, he must tell them, if they were to rescue Brat. "Cross yore heart an' sw'ar not to let 'em find out we know," he said. And then he hurriedly told about the plot that he had overheard. "I 'm out to warn my folks. We 'll be ready for 'em," he said gloatingly. "We 'll shoot up the gang; you bet we will!"

"O Jimps! Jimps!" Page cried. "You make my blood run cold, talking about murder that way. Harrison, what must we do? If only Mr. Sibold were at home!"

"That old feared-cat!" laughed Jimps. "He don't mix in no fuss."

"We must stop it ourselves, Page; we *must!*" exclaimed Harrison.

"Stop it! You can't," said Jimps. "I thought you mought git Brat out the way."

"Oh, we will! we must!" cried Page. "I 'm going to Manson to see Dr. Wayne. I 'll ask him to send for Brat right away."

Jimps scowled. "Seems like you-all mought git him, 'stead o' blabbin' to Doctor. I 'd git him, but I 've got to go an' warn my folks. Pooles is goin' to layway on the bluff this side

the river, an' aim to shoot our folks comin' from court this evenin'."

"Warn your kin-folks," said Harrison. "Tell them to keep away from court to-day. I 'll skiddoo to New Canaan and get the sheriff to swear in a lot of deputies and have out a bunch to arrest the Pooles."

"We don't want sheriffs," protested Jimps. "We c'n match them Pooles an' settle our own fuss. Thar 'll be sech a killin' as the mountains nuver knowed!"

"Jimps, shut your head!" Harrison said sternly. "You go and get your people to stay out of the way. Keep off a fight. This kind of thing 's got to stop. We 've got to let the law punish wrong-doing, instead of taking matters in our own hands. You rush right along now. I 'm off for the sheriff."

And away he ran.

"I wish there were something I could do," said Page. "Oh, I hate being a girl!"

"Look here!" said Jimps. "Bill an' Gaycy 's comin' here for ammernition, to git fixed for shootin'. Ef you c 'n hinder gittin' it—"

"I can—I will," Page cried eagerly.

Jimps darted homeward through the woods, and Page was left alone. She had had a sudden vision of herself standing heroically at the door and refusing to let the Pooles enter. But calm reflection put aside this plan. Bill Poole would push her away—would throttle her, if necessary—and get what he wanted. And if her conduct showed that any one suspected their plot, they would hasten their deadly work.

She might ask Mrs. Sibold to hide the ammunition; but the Pooles would require her to give it up, and she would do it, certainly and promptly. The good old soul was not the stuff of which heroes or martyrs are made.

Whatever was done, she—Page—must do it, alone and quickly.

Fortunately, she had been in the store with the Sibolds so often that she knew where they kept all their goods; and now Mrs. Sibold was in the garden, gathering vegetables. Page ran behind the counter and took box after box of cartridges and shells and powder and shot, carried them to her own room, and hid them in her bed between the straw tick and the feather-

bed. She had completed the task and was sitting quietly on the porch when Bill and Gaycy Poole strode down the road, hallooing that they wanted shells and cartridges.

Mrs. Sibold came bustling in to get what they ordered.

"Why, they ain't here!" she exclaimed, looking in the accustomed place. "Jefsey ought n't to move things without telling me where they are. Wait a minute and I 'll find them."

But a minute and ten minutes passed in a vain search, and the men grew impatient.

"Here, now! we 're in a hurry," Gaycy said, with an oath.

Mrs. Sibold fixed her honest, perplexed eyes on him. "That ain't no language for a post-office, young man," she said reprovingly. "If I can't find the things, I can't, can I? You 'll just have to wait till Jefsey gets back from the mill and—"

"We 've got no time to wait," he said roughly.

"Here!" Bill drew Gaycy aside. "Don't skeer the old critter an' let her know thar 's somethin' up," he mumbled. "We c 'n git on

'thout the ammernition. All the boys have got thar guns an' I reckon they 're loaded up. An' thar 's a old six-shooter an' some ca'tridges at my house. Let 's go by an' git 'em. We c'n go 'cross 'Way-High. An' in a pile o' rocks whar that mash-kittle was, thar 's—" he finished his sentence by throwing back his head, drawing in a mouthful of air, and smacking his lips.

Gaycy laughed. "I thought we mought rowst up a bottle somewhar. Come on."

Page watched them start off on the trail that led up Falling Water to the still and across 'Way-High Mountain to Bill Poole's cabin in Rocky Hollow. The men were hardly out of sight when Mr. Smith came, and Page jogged off with him and his mail-bags. She was so eager to see Dr. Wayne and get help for Brat that the way seemed terribly long. At last they reached Manson. With a hasty "Thank you and good-by!" to Mr. Smith, she jumped out of the buggy and ran to the doctor's door.

"Dr. Wayne! Dr. Wayne!" she called excitedly. "Oh! where is he? I must see him at once; oh, *at once!*"

Mrs. Wayne came out.

"He has gone to Berton Siding to attend to a brakesman who got hurt," she said. "He 'll be back soon. Why, dear! what *is* the matter?"

Page burst into tears and sobbed out the story.

The doctor's wife put a soothing arm around her. "There, there, dear!" she said. "Things are n't so bad. The boys will get officers and prevent the fight. In to-day's excitement the Pooles won't do anything about the child. As soon as Joseph comes home he 'll arrange to get him; and he 'll be here any minute. Come in and wait for him."

They waited for Dr. Wayne—waited and waited, while the leaden-footed hours crept by.

CHAPTER XII

THAT Tuesday morning found the Farlans taking life in their usual happy-go-lucky way. Minta sauntered into the woods, with a red bandanna handkerchief knotted at the corners to form a makeshift basket, and brought it back filled with the mushrooms she called "swamps" and "deer-horns." A fire was started in the pile of rocks that served as a fair-weather kitchen, and the family squatted or lay about at ease while a corn-cake was baking in the ashes and the mushrooms were frying with a piece of fat pork.

"Hey! Thar 's Jimps. He 's comin' hot-foot!" said Minta, glancing up the road.

Jimps's absence had caused his family no uneasiness. He often spent the night in the open, watching birds and beasts that, hidden by day, roam fearlessly by night. So it was not his absence but the manner of his return that now excited his family's interest.

" 'Lo Jimps! What 's drivin' you?" called Minta.

"We 're goin' to have a killin'," he sang out jubilantly; then he added in a lower tone: "We 're goin' to clean the mountains o' Pooles. They 're aimin' to git the drap on us, but we 'll do the shootin'."

"Harken to that!" exclaimed Mrs. Farlan.

"What crazy-like notion 's in yore head?" asked Minta.

In hurried, broken sentences Jimps told about the Pooles' plot.

"We 've got to let our folks know," he said. "Ev'y man 's got to be ready, with his gun an' all the ammernition he c'n git. We c'n go 'cross the river at the upper ford an' come down on Pooles. They 'll be set to layway us crossin' the ferry, an' we 'll take 'em back-sides. An' I brung it on," he exulted. "They 're gittin' on the rampage 'cause they think I sot Sheriff on 'em."

He laughed, but his mother looked troubled.

"So bein', you got to lay low," she said. "They 'll shoot you on sight."

"Naw, I ain't," he said fiercely. "I 'm a-

goin' to plant a Poole—Bill I want it to be—'fore sundown."

"Looky-here, son," said Mrs. Farlan, in a tone that Jimps had never before heard from her lips. "They got the drap on yore daddy, an' I can't spare you. Ef you won't be heedful, I 'll walk at yore side through the mountains all this day."

"What you want me to do?" Jimps asked sullenly.

"I want you to come with me an' the young uns down to the old sawmill on Fallin' Water. Ain't nobody apt to pester that place. Thar ain't no Pooles that-a-way but Bill, an' he 'll be on his way to court to that fracas."

A deep flush stained Jimps's face. "Gi' me yore petticoat, Nance," he said bitterly. "I 'm a baby, a gal-baby, that can't take a whack at the folks that shot my daddy."

His mother's lips twitched. "Ef you had a weepon—" she began.

"I 'm goin' to git one," he said confidently.

"Well, then," said his mother, "I ain't aimin' to keep you out o' yore part o' the fracas. But you ain't to offer yoreself to

Pooles to shoot. Here, you-all, come on. Thar ain't no minute to waste."

There was a brief flurry, like the starting up of a covey of partridges. Then the Farlans went off through the forest as quietly as a flock of birds.

At the sawmill Jimps left his mother and the children, provisioned for the day with some hunks of corn-bread and a bucket of huckleberries. He was going to New Canaan to warn his kin of the Pooles' attack. But he was in no hurry. On court days the men of the community spent the day at the county town, and the crowd would not break up until late in the afternoon. Then would come the feudist battle, and if he were to take part in it he must have a weapon. So he resolved to go back and get Mr. Sibold's gun, if the old man had returned. But when he came to the mouth of Rocky Run, he paused.

"Pore Brat!" he said to himself. "I wisht I could git him an' put him safe with our young uns. To-night I could take him to Dr. Wayne. I wonder ef Bill an' Marthy 's off totin' news, an' he thar by his lonesome?"

Jimps stood irresolute a moment; then keeping a keen lookout, he turned up Rocky Hollow. He did not follow the path. Instead, he scrambled along the bluff overlooking "Shearam's Den" and the Poole cabin. As he approached the hut he advanced very slowly, taking advantage of the shelter of every rock and clump of bushes. At last he reached the place where he and Page had hidden the day that Marthy Poole had frightened them away from the cabin. There he paused and scanned the house, the hollow, all the surrounding country. No one was in sight—no one, unless those were people—they might be cattle—far off and obscured by foliage, coming down 'Way-High Mountain.

If only Brat were alone!

Jimps crept cautiously to the cabin, and stopped at the hole he had hacked in the wall. It was stuffed now with old rags, and these he began to remove very carefully. He heard voices inside. They were not the harsh rumble of Bill Poole and the shrill tones of Marthy; they were young voices; one was especially sweet and soft, with a little lisp. Jimps knew

them both. He understood at once that Gabe and Molly Martin had been left here with Brat for safe-keeping. He stood listening, to find out whether Bill and Marthy Poole too were inside.

"Ketch Brat, Gabe, ketch him! Don't let him git away!" Molly called suddenly.

Then Jimps heard scampering footsteps and a little scrimmage.

"Now shet the door," said Molly.

"Aw, Molly! We don't want to be shet up in the dark," objected Gabe. "Let 'th tie him to the bed-potht. Then we c'n play whar we pleath. You keep still!" he said harshly to Brat, who was whimpering and struggling to escape.

Jimps was not yet sure that the children were alone. But when he heard Brat's pitiful cries, he forgot his caution and his fears. He rushed around the corner of the cabin, and sprang inside with a blood-curdling shriek.

"Devil will git them that hurt pore Brat!"

If his Satanic Majesty had appeared in person, Gabe and Molly could not have been more frightened. Jimps jerked up an old broom and

whacked them soundly, jeering and hooting at them as they ran, screaming, round and round the room. Presently they scrambled up the ladder into the loft.

Then Jimps turned to Brat, who was standing beside the table, too terrified to move, seized him, and ran out. As he did so he sent back a fierce threat to Gabe and Molly: "Ef you stir out that loft this day, I 'll skin you alive! Whoo-oop!" He ended with an Indian yell.

Then he dashed down the path. Time was too precious to spend it in making a way through the thicket.

At first Brat lay passive in his arms, too frightened to move or cry out. Suddenly he tried to jerk away, and gave a shrill, unhuman, awful cry that startled Jimps so he almost dropped the child.

"Lawzee! Is I skeered you plumb crazy?" he gasped. "Thar! thar!" he said recovering himself a little. "Don't be skeered. Ain't nothin' goin' to hurt you."

Brat moaned and kept on struggling.

"Why, hi, honey! Don't you mind them apples, them red apples?" Jimps hummed and

chirruped and whistled as he was wont to do to wild creatures and as he had done to the child the day before in the cabin on Rattlesnake Mountain.

Brat seemed to remember the call, or at least to realize that it came from a friend. He stopped whimpering, and cuddled in Jimps's arms.

Presently Jimps put him down and took his hand to lead him along. But they made such slow progress—it seemed a snail's pace—that again he picked Brat up and carried him. And so they approached Falling Water.

They were far on the path to safety, halfway to the sawmill. Why, then, was Jimps's face so pale, his eyes so anxious, his haste so urgent and frantic? Ah! he was sure now of what he had feared five minutes before. Those were dogs yelping on a trail—his trail! Those were fierce, pursuing voices. The figures he had seen coming down 'Way-High Mountain were Pooles; and they were after him.

If he left Brat, he might yet escape; but he felt sure that Bill would kill the child, as he had threatened to do the evening before. Cer-

tainly he would shoot him—Jimps, a Farlan—if he found him carrying the child away. And what good would it do Brat for him to die too? He would save himself. He loosened his hand-clasp. Brat tightened his hold, gave a quavering laugh, and perked his lips to a whistle, a mimicry of Jimps's wild-wood call. Poor little chap!

Jimps caught him in his arms and ran on and on and on, though his heart was pounding as if it would burst his body. And now it flashed upon him that there was one way of possible escape—the Jewel-Box. Only he and Page knew the place; every one else thought that cliff could not be climbed.

They came out of Rocky Hollow into the path beside Falling Water, which was rushing and dashing along its rocky way down the gorge. Suddenly Brat stopped and pulled back with all his might.

"Come on!" Jimps said urgently.

"No! no! no!" sobbed Brat, shaking as if with an ague, and as white as a ghost. "Water take me 'way."

"Naw, it won't!" cried Jimps. "We 've got

to go 'cross the water to keep mean folks from gittin' you. Come on!"

But Brat stood as if rooted to the spot. There was no time to argue, to persuade. Jimps caught him up, hurried along the trail, and waded the stream above Crystal Falls.

He went along the ledge, slid down the rock, and put Brat down in the nook that Page called the Jewel-Box. A precious treasure it now had in charge!—the safety, perhaps the lives, of the two little fugitives. If they could wait here, undiscovered, until their pursuers went away, they could go on down the stream and escape.

Brat looked vacantly around; then his face lighted and he uttered an exclamation of pleasure. The drops on the thin, coppery leaves of moss were glittering in the afternoon sunshine, catching a myriad dancing rays that changed them to topaz, sapphire, ruby, emerald.

"Pretty! pretty!" he cried, stretching his hands to grasp the treasures. "O-oh!" He gave a disappointed little cry as the shining loveliness vanished and left only wetness on his finger.

Jimps gave him a quick, startled glance. "Why, that 's like—"

Louder yells and yelps interrupted him.

"Sh-sh-sh!" he said, putting his finger on his lips and shaking his head at the child.

Brat gave a puzzled stare, and then turned back to the glittering gems. After trying again and again to pick them up, only to lose the treasures he grasped, he sat still, pointing his finger here and there, murmuring to himself: "That 's mine! An' that 's mine! An' that 's mine!"

Jimps crouched on the ledge and watched the trail on the other side of the stream. It was a lovely afternoon, soaked through with sunshine until it seemed turned to gold. The trees, stirred by a gentle breeze, were making soft little sounds, like a baby murmuring as it falls asleep on its mother's breast. The monotonous noise of the waterfall had a lulling, soothing sound. Some sulphur butterflies drifted into the Jewel-Box and alighted on the verdant moss. A goldfinch bounded through the air, twittering as it came, and poised upon a swaying weed to harvest its seeds. A lovely, peace-

ful scene! Ah! louder than breeze and bird-song, rising even over the dashing waters, came those menacing, terrifying sounds—the baying of dogs on a hot trail, the encouraging calls of men behind them.

Then they came in sight. The dogs, with their noses to the ground, ran to the place where Jimps had entered the stream. They stopped short and then trotted along the bank, sniffing the air and trying to regain the lost scent. Urging them on were Bill and Gaycy Poole.

Jimps turned to adjure Brat to keep still; but the warning was unnecessary. The child, wearied of his elusive gems, had stretched out in the sunshine and was asleep.

Jimps crouched down, holding his breath. He felt as if those men must feel his eyes on them, must see him through the close rhododendron-bushes on that seemingly impassable cliff. They stood talking together. He could see their lips moving, but no sound of their voices came over the clatter of the waterfall.

But it was easy to guess what they were saying: Whoever had carried off Brat had taken

to the water so as to break the trail. He could not wade far, either down-stream or up; for just below them was Crystal Falls, and Little Falls was above them, between them and Butterfly Flat. Sooner or later the fugitive must come out on the side where they were, for they thought there was no way of escaping on the opposite cliff.

Bill and Gaycy went down the trail to the foot of the falls, but the dogs did not regain the lost scent. So, deciding that the fugitive must have gone the other way, the men came back. They paused near the place where Jimps had crossed, and presently one of the hounds ran into the stream. Five steps farther it would regain the scent. It paused at the rapid current, started on, and then—then a weird, unearthly, awful cry rang out suddenly. The dog stopped, whimpering, with its nose in the air. Bill Poole jumped and looked around. He said something to Gaycy, and they seemed trying to locate the direction of the sound. Then they hurried up the trail, with the dogs at their heels.

Jimps turned, shivering, and looked at the

child. He had cried out in his sleep, and had not awakened, though he was frowning and twitching restlessly.

A slow half-hour passed. Jimps grew impatient. He and Brat ought to be going. But he dared not cross the stream and return to the trail above the falls; the Pooles might still be on the lookout. They would have to descend the cliff where he and Page had climbed up; he could keep in the edge of the stream a while, and then take the path to the sawmill. There he would leave Brat, and, giving up hopes of the gun, he would hurry to New Canaan, to warn his kin of the waylaying Pooles; for it was getting late.

"Git up, Brat! Git up! We got to go," he said.

The child opened his eyes with a wide, vacant stare; then shivered and clutched Jimps's hand. They started down the cliff. The way was difficult, impossible for the awkward, staggering feet of the child. Jimps lowered him from the ledge to a rock, and climbed to a lower foothold and reached up and got him. He put the child in the forks of a rhododendron-bush and helped

him down another step. So they went slowly down the cliff. At first Brat obediently stepped or held where Jimps directed. But when he caught a glimpse of the waterfall through the foliage, he seemed paralyzed with terror. Jimps had to bear him along by main force.

Standing on a narrow ledge, he leaned over to put Brat beside an azalea-bush, and the rotten shale gave way under their weight. There was one second in which Jimps might have saved himself by dropping the child and seizing a root or a stone; but he did not do it. He thrust Brat against the bush, and then,—then he tried to catch and save himself. It was too late! He went crashing down on the rock below. There he lay, without movement or sign of life.

Brat, propped between the rock and the bush, sat trembling. He seemed not to realize what had befallen his friend, nor to be frightened at his own perilous position. With wide, terrified eyes, he gazed at the rushing stream; then, shuddering, he turned and tried to climb away from it. An impossible task for his weak little feet! He slipped and went down the cliff,

and the knifelike edge of a protruding rock gashed his head.

Presently Jimps stirred and uttered a faint moan. He opened his eyes and looked around vaguely.

"I feel mighty funny; dauncy-like," he muttered.

He tried to get up, but fell back with a groan. He lay still a while; then, very carefully so as not to bring that sharp pain to his leg again, he sat up. His right arm hung limp and twisted, and his leg was crumpled under him.

"I done broke my leg," he said, speaking slowly, as if explaining matters to a self that was remote from the wounded body. "An' my shoulder hurts. I 'm—I 'm hurtin' all over."

He eased himself down again, and lay there with his eyes shut.

Where was he? What had happened?—Oh! he remembered: Brat, the Pooles, the Jewel-Box, on the way to the sawmill.

"I got to go—go on," he gasped. "Ef I don't, Pooles 'll git the drap on all our folks, like they done on pappy."

But the effort to get up only brought back

jabbing pains in his leg and shoulder, and made him sick and dizzy. "Brat! Brat!" he called.

There was a clump of rhododendron between him and the child; he could not see the little figure stretched on the rock—very still at first, but stirring when he called again.

Presently the child sat up and looked around. His vague expression changed; now he was dazed and bewildered. He got up and came from behind the bush, stepping slowly and uncertainly; it seemed as if his mind like his body was groping toward something he wanted.

After a long pause Jimp's voice came again. "Brat! Brat! Uh, pore little un! little un!"

The child gave a cry—not his old unhuman shriek, but an answering call that sounded like Jimps's name; he seemed for the first time to see Jimps and went, staggering, toward him.

The narrow gorge had lost the full sunlight now. One long ray pierced the foliage and shone on the fair face of the child, on the blue eyes and on the golden hair which was stained with blood. But the light was not merely from without. The eyes were no longer vacant and dim and wandering; they were fixed steadily

on Jimps with a look of full recognition. That was not the sagging, empty face Jimps had seen an hour ago. It was another face. It was—it was—

"Grief!" he gasped.

"Jimp!" cried a glad, loving little voice.

The child's arms were around Jimps; his lips were at their well-remembered dear trick of giving "a chain of kisses" to encircle his neck. Jimps sank back on the rock.

"It 's a angel, a good pityin' angel," he murmured.

"Jimp! my Jimp!"

The kisses seemed very real.

"Who—who are you?" faltered the boy, staring hard at the face, so strangely, so impossibly familiar.

"Grief."

"But you 're dead. You 're drownded in Fallin' Water."

The child shuddered. "The bad water got me. I ain't nuver goin' 'way from my Jimp." He lifted his head and gave a broken, faltering whistle.

Jimps smiled. "That 's Grief," he said.

"He nuver got that right. He al'ays made a break on the middle. Grief!"

Yes, the child was real. By some miracle, it was little Grief that he had saved from the Pooles. No, not saved. The child was not safe yet, and he himself was in pain and danger.

"Yore head 's cut. Don't it hurt you?" Jimps put a gentle finger-tip on the wound in the child's head.

"Umph-m-m." The child made a dissenting murmur.

Jimps lay still a minute. He could not go for help. Terribly bruised, with dislocated shoulder and broken leg, he could not go the rough way to the sawmill. Could the child go with a message? He clasped the little hands close.

"Harken, little Grief!" he said, speaking slowly and solemnly, as one giving a life-and-death charge. "Go down-stream. Go down the path. You come to a sawmill. Stay thar. Tell mammy to come—git me—an' she 's got to go—go—"

The child burst into tears and threw his arms around Jimps.

"Quick! Down the path. The sawmill. Mammy—mammy—"

"Yes! yes!" sobbed Grief. He kissed Jimps. Ah! the same sweet trick of leaving "a kiss to stay till I come back."

He went through the water and clambered up the bank to the path. There he stood still a minute. Then Jimps saw him turn away from the path that led to safety and to help. He took the up-stream way, the path toward Rocky Hollow.

"Come back! Pooles 'll git you," called Jimps. "Grief! Grief! Go t 'other way!"

But his faint voice did not go across the rushing water, over the din of the falls. He groaned. He tried to drag himself up the bluff, to follow and save the child, to get help for his kinsmen, to— Sharp pains darted through him; everything turned black before him; he reeled and fell.

A wood-thrush raised its sweet, clear note near by. But it was unanswered by the one who had so often repeated its call. He was lying, helpless and unconscious, at the foot of the bluff.

CHAPTER XIII

WHEN Harrison Ruffin left Page and Jimps at the Sibolds', he hurried down the mountain to New Canaan, the little county town.

At first he followed the unfrequented woods road winding between Gap and Deer mountains. As he passed the Farlan cabin, he gave it a glance and saw that it was empty. Jimps, speeding through the unpathed forest, had arrived fifteen minutes before, and the Farlans were already on their way to the old sawmill.

A mile below the cabin the road joined the main highway. On the four miles between the cross-roads and New Canaan, Harrison passed many people, singly or in little groups. They were slouching along afoot; jogging on mule-back or horse-back; traveling in wagons, ox-carts, buggies. Many of the lank, raw-boned men had wicked-looking guns on their shoulders or pistols stuck in their belts.

In all the miles he met no one, for that day every man's face was turned in the same direction. It was court day. And court day in a Southern rural community draws its crowd equaled only by a county fair or a "big meeting."

As Harrison approached the river, the country flattened itself out into a little valley, and the road made a sharp elbow between the river and a bluff. He glanced at the bluff where, Jimps had said, the Pooles planned to lie in wait to attack the Farlans. The place was well chosen. The bend of the road was secluded, and any number of men could lie concealed on the rocky, wooded cliff, and could flee and hide in the forest beyond.

Harrison turned the elbow. The road lay straight and open to the river, where a ferry-boat plied back and forth, carrying the crowds to the county town on the opposite shore. He crossed the river in the loaded boat, which moved slowly along, propelled by clumsy wooden sweeps, and held against the current by a rope looped over a stout wire that was stretched between poles on the river-banks.

While the ferryman was fastening the boat by winding a chain around a stake, Harrison sprang ashore and hurried to Sheriff Price's home.

He was met at the door by the sheriff's mother, a yellowish little shriveled woman, who looked like an early-plucked unripe apple.

"Jim? Lawzee! He 's t' other side the lake, I reckon," she said in answer to Harrison's question. "It 's some moonshine business. Folks is makin' a mighty upstir 'bout liquor nowadays. *I* say thar 's a heap worser things 'n whisky in the mountains. Why, they say at Lake Hotel even church members dance an' play kyards an'—"

"Please, ma'am, when will the sheriff be back?" Harrison interrupted.

"Uh! some time to-day. Jim nuver missed a whole court-day since he was knee-high to a grasshopper."

"But he may be too late," muttered Harrison. "I 'll go to Mr. Jobson. He 's a lawyer; he 'll know what to do."

The lawyer listened to Harrison's story, and then said deliberately: "The proper legal pro-

cedure in this case is to put the threatening parties, the aforesaid Pooles, under peace bond.''

''Peace bond?''

''Yes.'' The lawyer began a leisurely explanation. ''William and Gaycy Poole have been heard to threaten violence, and on testimony of the person who heard them they can be required to promise, under bond, not to molest—''

''Promise not to molest!'' exclaimed Harrison. ''Why, they 're inciting their whole gang, and they 're on their way this minute, with guns in their hands, to shoot all the Farlans.''

''So you suppose, so you suppose. But every one of those men must be regarded as innocent until he is, and is proved, guilty.''

''If that 's law—to let the Pooles kill the Farlans before anything is done to keep them from shooting—I don't think much of the law,'' said Harrison.

''You are probably unnecessarily alarmed,'' Mr. Jobson said, with a smile that made Harrison flush. ''These mountain bullies often threaten to 'eat people up alive,' but they con-

tinue to satisfy their appetites with ground-hogs and mud-cats. If you desire a peace bond, however, to relieve your feelings, you, having heard these threats, will have to swear—"

"I did n't hear the Pooles," Harrison said curtly. "Jimps Farlan did. I 'll find him and send him to you. That peace bond seems to me a mighty poor thing, but I suppose it 's better than nothing. And Jimps and I can warn his people."

He went out to look for Jimps. The little town, usually so still and sleepy, was now thronged and noisy. Men were bustling up and down the street, standing on the sidewalks, perched on fences, squatting in little groups in vacant lots; chewing tobacco and talking; whittling and talking; drinking and talking. It was a rare social occasion.

Harrison, with one subject in mind, paused only long enough to catch the drift of the conversations.

"Yeh, Jone! Ef you want to rent good land for corn—"

"Doc say thar ain't no chance ef flu gits—"

"How 'bout that pig you was to pay for,

court 'fore last? Is you aimin' to let him git growed an' give hog price?''

''Shuh! grand jury 's countin' liquor cases by dozens an'—''

''Ef I 'd 'a' been Pres'dent when the war come on—''

''Number One oak lumber to sell—''

''An' Joe Price's sister told mammy she heared—''

Harrison went into the court-house. Perhaps Jimps had followed a friend or kinsman in the shifting crowd that went to hear evidence and argument in cases where plaintiff and defendant were familiar acquaintances of half the county. No Jimps. He went to the two ''general merchandise'' shops, where men were buying crackers and cheese and treating to soft drinks. Jimps was not there. He scoured the alleys where horse-traders were chaffering and staging occasional races with a little betting on the side. He even examined groups in fence-corners and tumble-down sheds, where poker games were going on and jugs and bottles containing liquids not openly salable were being handed around. He searched every place, every

nook and corner, over and over again. But he did not find Jimps.

"Do you know the Farlans and Pooles, sir?" Harrison asked a substantial-looking man whom he met at a street-corner.

"By sight and by ill name," was the reply. "Farlans are scattered around. That 's Tom Farlan trying to trade off the gray mule. His brother Peter is at that peddler's cart. I saw the Poole gang together back of the blacksmith shop—up to some devilment, I reckon. What Pooles or Farlans are you looking for, young man?"

Harrison mumbled a vague answer. The man went away, and Harrison stood still, frowning at his own thoughts. Oh! where was Jimps Farlan, who ought to have been here warning his kinsmen an hour ago? The sun was westering. In two or three hours the Pooles would cross the river and station themselves on that bluff. Soon the Farlans would follow, going together not only for friendship and company, but also because the old feud made conflicts always probable and there was safety in numbers. They would go up the road as far as the bluff—

Ought he to seek out and warn them? Would they believe his tale? If they did, might n't they turn on the Pooles and fight them here and now?

Oh! what should he do? How could he, an outsider and alone, prevent the feudist battle? Suddenly his face brightened.

"I 've got it!" he exclaimed.

It might not be a legal plan or a wise plan, but he believed it would work; he would make it work! He ran to the livery-stable and hired a horse; and after a little private talk with the stableman, he thrust something into his pocket. Then he mounted and galloped away.

Just a boy on a reckless pleasure ride, he seemed to the Pooles whom he passed at the blacksmith shop. There were Andy and Gaycy and Reece and a dozen others. How set and cruel and eager they looked, clutching their guns with sure, tense hands!

Harrison Ruffin was no coward, but when he saw those men and thought of what he was planning to do, he shuddered and turned pale. Could he do it? Would the desperate plan succeed? A picture flashed into his mind. He

saw himself—a little, little fellow—trying to dam a swollen brook with a wisp of grass, that the fierce current caught and dashed over, triumphing. As—as—if now he failed—

But not for one instant did his purpose waver. He summoned the ferryman, made the slow journey across the river, laid the length of his whip upon the horse's flank, and sped up the road.

Bill Poole, who was sitting under a willow-tree on the bank of the river, gave the boy an idle glance and then settled back to wait for his gang.

Although Mr. Jobson had attached slight importance to what Harrison had said, he did intend to mention the matter to the sheriff and advise him to look out for the Pooles when the court crowd was breaking up. But, busy with one little case after another, he forgot the matter until late in the afternoon, when he went into the sheriff's office to ask if the witnesses had been summoned in a certain case.

As he went in, Mr. Price stopped in the middle of a joke to answer the urgent telephone. The officer's face changed from idle jollity to

startled concern. His eyes bulged in his red face, and he uttered one exclamation after another:

"By heck, Doctor! . . . Gee whiz! . . . On the bluff? . . . Gosh, Doc! . . . Yes, suh; yes, suh! . . . Drat it! . . . Quick as I kin, ef it ain't too late."

He slung up the receiver and turned to the group of gaping men.

"Doc Wayne," he said hastily. "He says Pooles aim to hide on the bluff yon-side the river an' shoot down Farlans goin' home. Some boys was to let us know."

"You 'd better get a posse as quickly as possible," interrupted Mr. Jobson.

"I see a bunch o' Farlans goin' to the ferry a while ago," said a man who had just come in. "I bet Pooles is over the river."

"Stir yore stumps!" the sheriff cried hastily. "You-all got yore guns? Martin, you an' Jim Butler an'—"

He quickly collected strapping, mettlesome men, and they hurried to the ferry.

There was indeed no time to lose. The Poole gang had crossed the river three-quarters of

an hour before. And now the ferry-boat was on its way back, after carrying over the Farlans. They were still in sight on the other side of the river. The sheriff shouted to them to stop. But, not understanding the summons, they only yelled and waved back, and then went on up the road and disappeared behind the river's fringe of willows.

"Lawd! we 'll be too late," groaned the sheriff. Shops and court-house and streets were emptied now. Men crowded into the ferry-boat and into every available skiff and canoe and rowboat, and hurried across the river, expecting every second to hear a fusillade from the bluff.

Up the road where the Farlans were going the Pooles had hurried just before, as eager for the shooting as boys for a football game.

"I sold my horse for this six-shooter," said Reece Poole. "It 'll take me farther 'n he would."

"My gun 's got two barrels," remarked Bill Poole, holding it up. "One fixed old Jim Farlan. T' other 's ready for that boy, Whistlin' Jimps, o' his 'n."

"Whoop! Won't thar be a bone-pickin'!—nary a starvin' buzzard in the mountains this year!" exclaimed Gaycy.

"Here! scoot up the bluff," said Bill Poole, laughing with the others.

An ominous *click! click! click!* in the thicket above them cut their laughter short.

"Hands up! or we shoot!" cried a stern voice.

Bill Poole, lightning-quick, raised his gun; but it tumbled from his hand as a bullet went through his right wrist.

"Drop your guns! Hands up!"

At the repeated command, so grimly emphasized, every weapon clattered on the ground and every hand was raised.

"Farlans! An' got the drap on us," Gaycy Poole muttered, with an oath.

"Walk down the road to the ferry; slow. Anybody that lowers his hand or turns his head or starts to run is a dead man!"

There was a second's hesitation.

"One! Two!—"

The Pooles did not wait for "Three!" the signal to shoot. They turned sullenly and

slouched down the road, gnashing their teeth with helpless rage, expecting every second to be followed by bullets. But worse than bullets was coming to them. At the bend of the road they met the Farlans face to face.

For an amazed second the Farlans stared at the braggart, fire-eating bullies coming down the road with their hands high in the air, retreating—from whom? from what? The road behind them was empty, except for an old stray sheep that came out of the thicket, shaking his head and uttering a dismal "Baa!"

"Is that what skeered 'em?" cried one of the Farlan boys.

The tense silence was broken by a mighty burst of laughter.

With a bellow like an angry bull, Bill Poole lowered his head and ran butting at the foremost Farlan. The youngster dodged, jumped up and cracked his heels together, and snapped his fingers, shouting: "Hooray! Farlans! Farlans!"

Knives were being drawn and the Farlans had out their guns when the sheriff and his party came up and prevented the fight.

There was a hurried inquiry. The Farlans testified joyously that when they came up the road from the ferry they met the Pooles running away from nobody and nothing but a stray sheep.

"Who done *this?*" yelled Bill Poole, showing his wounded hand.

Who indeed? The Pooles had been waylaid and ambushed from the bluff. But not a Farlan man was missing; and the search, made after so much delay, discovered no one.

"Hey, boys!" a waggish fellow proclaimed solemnly. "It must 'a' been that old sheep."

The joke pleased the crowd. They roared with laughter. "Baa!" "Baa-a-a!" "Baa-a-a-a-a!" they yelled as long as breath held out.

The Pooles stood a minute, glowering before the shouting, laughing crowd, and then turned and fled up the road.

But long before they turned back, Harrison Ruffin had slid down the bluff and seized their weapons and thrown them into the river. Then he sped back to where his horse was tied and went pounding up the mountain. His plan had succeeded! He had lawlessly enforced the law!

While these stirring events were taking place, Mr. Sheringham was alone in his "Den." He was resenting rather than enjoying the golden afternoon, so out of keeping with his own feelings. He strode restlessly around the cabin.

"Heaven! it 's dreary!" he muttered to himself, as was his lonely habit. "Who would think a place, a man, could change so?"

His thoughts drifted back to the time, ten years before, when he had come hither with his University chums. What gay days they had had here in this cabin they called "Jolly Hunters' Lodge"! And then he met Nancy Bane. He could see her now, as on that first day—crossing the stream barefooted, in her dull blue gown, with a berry-basket in her hand. How lovely she was, with her flower-like face, the deep blue eyes, the masses of bright hair, the tender mouth, the firm chin! And how bright and brave and gay!

Because he was so proud of her and loved her so dearly, he wanted her to adapt herself to his world; but she thought he was fault-finding and ashamed of her, and so she ran away and went back to her old home. He had seen

only the squalor and poverty of that life, had failed to understand her independence and pride and love of freedom, and the call of the mountains.

"You may stay away," he could hear now his own angry voice. "But you shall not keep my child, my son, Griffin Sheringham."

And he could see her now as she stood clasping the child, with her mournful, fearless eyes fixed on his face. "He ain't your 'n any more; he 's mine, all mine. He ain't Griffin Sheringham now; he 's named Grief—Grief—Grief Bane." How her voice had lingered on the melancholy words, the name she had wrought for the boy out of his father's name and her own!

And he, blind fool that he was! had stormed out that he would have the child; the law would give it to him.

"Thar can't be no law to take a child from the mother that borned him with the pains of death," she had answered.

So he had left her. And then that awful news had come: his child was drowned; his wife was at death's door. His heart breaking

with love and their common grief, he had gone to her—only to arrive too late.

Her sister had met him with bitter words.

"We 've heared 'bout yore lawin'. Well, the child that yore men-folks' law say you c'n take from its mammy is dead; an' so is she. Go an' seek yore child in Fallin' Water."

Why did he linger here, with these bitter thoughts and mournful memories? Why plague himself by going over and over the hopeless, unchangeable past?

He dropped down on a chair, picked up the first book that came to his hand, and began to read. All at once a shadow fell across the page. He looked up, and then started and stared at the face in front of him—a pallid little face with wide blue eyes and fair hair touched to golden glory by the sun behind it, and dabbled with blood—like—so like— He shut his eyes and groaned. It would pass away in a minute, this creature of his sick fancy.

Then he heard panting breaths. He felt rather than heard steps coming toward him, and a hand as light as a butterfly fluttered down on his arm.

He looked again at the pale little face. Heavens! Was he losing his mind, that he could not see a stranger with blue eyes and fair hair without at once conjuring up the ghost of his dead child?

Before he could twist his trembling lips to a question, the child spoke:

"Go thar quick. He hurts so bad." The little fellow panted and reeled, for, injured as he was, he had come in haste, following the nearest path and stopping at the first door, to summon help.

"Who hurts?" asked Mr. Sheringham.

"He 's by the bad water that took me," said the child. "Whar it pours down."

"Who? Who 's *he?*"

"Jimp."

"Jimp who?"

"Jimp; my Jimp. He 's—he 's—" The child gave a cooing whistle. "That 's him," he said. "Come on."

"Do you mean," asked Mr. Sheringham, "that somebody got hurt and sent you for help?"

The child nodded. "It 's Jimp. Go thar."

Mr. Sheringham would have said that it was none of his business, that aid must be sought elsewhere; but he could not. The little fellow had grasped his fingers and was tugging at them, making curious vibrations through him; not since his hand rested on his own baby had he touched a child.

"Quick!" The child's voice faltered. He tottered and would have fallen if Mr. Sheringham had not caught him. He drenched the little face with cold water, and the blue eyes fluttered open. "Quick!" he gasped, and then fainted again.

Mr. Sheringham lifted the boy in his arms—so frail a burden it was!—and started to lay him on the bed; but after a moment's hesitation, he went out of the house and, with the child's head resting on his shoulder, walked rapidly down the path.

"Whar the water pours down," he repeated.

CHAPTER XIV

FOLLOWING the little fellow's directions, Mr. Sheringham came to Jimps on the rock at the foot of Crystal Falls. He laid down the child and examined the injured boy.

"I might—" he began, looking at the dislocated shoulder and the broken leg; then he frowned and shook his head. "He is badly hurt—how badly I don't know. I 'd better rush for a doctor. I 'll go and borrow Sibold's horse."

He laid Jimps flat on a smooth rock, and then turned to the child, who had now regained consciousness and was sitting up.

"Are you afraid?" asked Mr. Sheringham; "afraid to stay here while I go for a doctor?"

The little fellow did not lift his eyes from his friend's face.

"Jimp!" he called.

Jimps opened his eyes and tried to speak. "Grie-ie—" His voice died away in a sighing

breath, the heavy eyelids dropped, and he lay quite still.

The child stroked one of the limp hands and said softly: "Jimp! uh, Jimp! Wake up. Open yore eyes."

"Ah! you 're a good little true friend!" Mr. Sheringham said, patting the child's head; then he turned away. "I 'll hurry all I can."

As he started up the path, he heard hoof-beats and clattering wheels coming up the saw-mill road from Manson. Perhaps here was a swifter messenger than he; at least, there would be some one to sit beside the wounded boy until the doctor came. He climbed the bluff to the road, and saw a buggy with a man and a girl in it. The man—thank God!—was Dr. Wayne.

"Doctor! Doctor! Come here, quick!" Mr. Sheringham called. "Here 's a boy that 's hurt."

The girl—it was Page Ruffin—uttered an exclamation of impatience. "Oh! We must hurry."

But the doctor, quick to answer any call of need, caught up his medicine-case and sprang out of the buggy.

"Where?"

"Down here; just below the falls. A child came to my house for help."

As Mr. Sheringham answered he was leading the way down the bluff.

"Brat!" exclaimed Page, seeing first the child sitting on the rock. "Why, Dr. Wayne! it 's Brat, the very child you came to get. Oh! what is the matter with him?"

"He is n't hurt; at least, not badly, I think," said Mr. Sheringham. "He has a slight head wound. The other boy has a broken leg and—"

"It 's Jimps Farlan!" cried Page. "Is—is he dead?"

A deathlike figure it was, indeed, that lay there, pale and unconscious. The doctor gave the aid that he could render at once; and, with the help of Mr. Sheringham, he set the broken leg and put the dislocated shoulder in place.

"He may have other injuries," said Dr. Wayne. "He has evidently had a terrible fall. We must get him down the mountain as quickly as possible. Take my buggy, Sheringham, and go to Sibold's. Ask him to bring his wagon with a mattress and pillows in it."

"Oh! save him, Dr. Wayne; don't let him die," Page implored. "He was trying—don't you see?—to help Brat. He was getting him away from those awful Pooles."

"We 'll do our best," the doctor said cheeringly.

He bared Jimps's arm and gave a hypodermic stimulant.

Jimps opened his eyes and looked around with a dazed stare; he tried to raise himself on his elbow, and fell back.

"I—I feel mighty dauncy," he said wonderingly.

"You got hurt somehow," explained the doctor. "But you 'll soon be all right."

"Uh, yes! I mind it now. I was tryin' to set Brat—an' him little Grief!—in a bush. That rock broke off an' I tumbled down. But little Grief 's all right."

"'Little Grief'!" the doctor said to Page. "What does he mean?"

"Grief was the name of his cousin he was very fond of," said Page. "One that 's dead. He was drowned."

"Oh! he 's delirious—talking about Nancy

Bane's child. It was drowned here in Falling Water."

"Naw," said Jimps, "not drownded. Here he is."

The child had been sitting quietly at one side, watching them with grave, concerned eyes. Now he crept close to Jimps and began to fondle his hand.

"Jimps, this is Brat," Page exclaimed gently; "the child that the Pooles took from the poorhouse and kept shut up. Somehow, you got him away."

"When you are stronger you 'll tell us all about it," said Dr. Wayne. "Now you 'd better lie still a while. You 've a trying journey before you."

"Where?" asked Page, thinking with a shudder of the Farlan cabin. "Are you going to take him home?"

"To my home," answered Dr. Wayne; "and see what we can do for him, poor brave little chap!"

"And Brat?"

"I 'll take him, too, for to-night," he said. "I 'll dress that wound on his head. Then I 'll

turn him over to Mr. Truitt, to carry with the other children to Richmond to-morrow."

"Oh! I am so glad!" Page's face lighted, but it grew quickly grave as she glanced at Jimps. He was looking earnestly at the child beside him.

"Little Grief!" he said in a low voice. "I 'm mighty glad I got you." He lay still a while. "Wa' n't that like them Pooles?"

"What?" asked Page.

"I dunno. Somethin' mean they did. But it 's all right now.—Hey, Page! How 'd you git here?"

"Dr. Wayne and I were coming from Manson. He was going to get Brat. After you told us—"

Dr. Wayne shook his head and put his finger on his lips. He did not wish Jimps to be reminded of the Pooles and their plot. "Mr. Sheringham met us and brought us here to help you," he said.

"Old Shearam?" asked Jimps.

"Yes. He found you. You had fallen and hurt yourself."

"Um-m! But I got little Grief."

"Yes; yes," the doctor said, trying to soothe the boy whose mind he thought was wandering. "Now lie still."

There was a little silence. Above the noise of the stream they heard the wagon clattering along the rocky road. It stopped, and Mr. Sheringham and Mr. Sibold came and helped carry Jimps up the bluff and put him into the wagon.

"Good job!" said Dr. Wayne. "Now, Sheringham, when I lift him, slip that blanket under him, so-o!"

Jimps looked up at Mr. Sheringham. "It 's two times you 've holped me," he said slowly. "I reckon I c'n nail up them holes I broke in yore windows. An' Brat—"

All at once the whole past flashed on his mind. He screamed and tried to jump up.

"I 've got to go!" he shrieked. "Good Lawd! They 'll kill my folks. Let me go! Let me go!"

Dr. Wayne caught him and jabbed a hypodermic needle into his arm. He struggled more faintly, and then fell back stupefied.

"Drive on, Mr. Sibold; very carefully," said

the doctor. "I 'll be right behind you. Miss Page, I 'll have to leave you to go on to Butterfly Flat alone. It is n't far. Here, Sheringham, I 'll take that child in the buggy with me."

With a gentle, lingering hold that was an awkward caress, Mr. Sheringham lifted Brat to the seat beside Dr. Wayne; then, with drooping head and bowed shoulders, he went up the path toward Rocky Hollow.

As they drove slowly down the mountain, Dr. Wayne made friends with the child. Brat was n't his name, the boy said emphatically. His name was Grief. Grief—he did n't know what. But it was Grief. And that boy asleep in the wagon was Jimp, his Jimp, that took him walking and showed him birds and squirrels. He ran away from Jimp and fell in the bad water.

The doctor started and looked earnestly at the child. "How did you get out?" he asked. "Did Bill or Marthy Poole pull you out? and keep you in their cabin?"

"I jest was out. An' Jimp was thar on the rock. Who 's Bill an' Marthy Poole?" the child asked, with a puzzled frown.

"Good heavens!" thought Dr. Wayne. "That boy 's right. It *is* Sheringham's child!"

Sheringham's child! Nancy Bane's little son, saved in some way from the mad torrent, but with a blow that had banged shut the door of his mind. From the time that the water had dashed him head-foremost against a rock until to-day, when he fell down the cliff and came to himself beside his beloved Jimps, all was a blank to him.

The doctor examined the wound on his head. It was a clean line fracture. Ah! that had relieved the brain pressure caused by the first blow and had restored him to a normal condition.

Dr. Wayne questioned the child gently and carefully. Did he remember his father? He did n't have any father, he said. There was mammy. She hollered when he fell in the water. And there were "the chillen." He liked Minta and Nance and Looey; but Jimps—his face lighted up—he was Jimp's boy.

"Here we are, Doc," called Mr. Sibold, stopping his wagon at Dr. Wayne's door. "And the boy 's stood the trip fine."

"Eh? What? Oh! oh, yes!" said the doctor, his far thoughts coming home. "Help me get the chap in. And, Sibold, I want you to take a message to Sheringham when you go back home. I must see him; about something of the utmost importance."

"To-night?" asked Mr. Sibold.

"Yes. H'm! No; it won't do to excite my patients. Tell him to come to-morrow morning. Easy there, my man!"

Jimps was put to bed in a big, airy room; but, though he was cared for gently and skilfully, he tossed restlessly, calling, "Grief! Grief! Grief!" And downstairs in the nursery the child was wailing, "Jimp! I want my Jimp!" At last Dr. Wayne carried the child to Jimps's room. They cuddled in each other's arms and fell asleep.

After office hours the doctor's bell rang, and Jane came to say: "There 's a man and a woman wanting to see you, sir. His hand is hurt."

Dr. Wayne stepped into his office, and found himself face to face with Bill and Marthy Poole. Ah! here was a chance to probe for

facts. First, however, he examined Bill's wounded wrist.

"How did you get shot?" asked the doctor.

"Jest got shot."

"Who did it?"

"I dunno. I was walkin' 'long the road, an' thar come a shot."

"Was any one killed; any one else hurt?" inquired the doctor.

"Nobody a-tall. Jest one shot was fired."

"You—Bill Poole!—were shot! And did n't shoot back?"

A curious expression flitted over the man's face. "Naw," he drawled. "Me an' some o' my folks was walkin' up the road. I got shot. An' we walked back down the road."

"Baa!" commented the doctor incredulously.

Bill started to his feet and ripped out a furious oath.

"Here, fellow! What do you mean?" the doctor exclaimed angrily, looking with amazement at the man's livid face and blazing eyes.

Marthy caught her husband by the arm and spoke quickly in his ear: "Sh-sh! Shet up. He don't mean—*that.*"

"How dare you speak to me in that way?" Dr. Wayne said sternly. "What 's the matter with you, anyhow?"

Bill's face cleared. He gave an apologetic murmur and sat down again. The doctor busied himself with dressing the wound, frowning thoughtfully as he tried to make out what had happened. Probably his telephoned warning had enabled the sheriff to check the feudist plot. But what about this shooting affair? Well, it was n't a very serious one, if this was the only casualty; and certainly Bill Poole's face and story were not those of a victor.

Dr. Wayne fastened the bandage, and then looked the man straight in the eyes. "Bill Poole," he demanded, "why did you take Nancy Bane's child?"

Before the man realized what he was doing, he gave a direct answer to the direct question: "I ain't knowed who he was when I pulled him out o' Fallin' Water."

"You found out mighty soon."

"I jest thought I 'd hide him a while, to plague them Farlans."

"And then?"

"Then he did n't have no sense," burst out the mountaineer. "I knowed they 'd think we harmed him—a baby child like that! An' he tried to run away. He was al'ays tryin' to run away. Thar wa'n 't nothin' to do but to keep him shet up."

"Whar is he now? Uh, tell me, ef you know," implored Marthy.

"Safe. Where his father will take care of him. And he 's come to his senses."

"Uh! pore little un!" breathed Marthy.

"Here! let 's have the whole story," said the doctor.

And so they told it.

Marthy and Bill had been on their way to the store that day, and they saw the child in the water just below Little Falls. Not knowing who he was, Bill plunged in and, narrowly escaping being swept down-stream himself, caught the child and dragged him out.

"Then we see Farlans come racin' an' screechin'," said Marthy, "an' we knowed it was thar brat Bill had e'en-a'most drownded himself to git. An' he cussed an' drapped him in the bushes; not to hurt him; jest to plague

them. An' I told 'em I see somethin' like a yaller-headed child go over the big falls."

"I heard that tale," said Dr. Wayne. "Go on."

"Whenso they went away, I got Brat," said Marthy. "We aimed to turn him loose, to go home. But he—he did n't have no sense. We could n't leave him thar, to fall in the creek or die. An' we could n't take him back; not after what I told 'em. They 'd 'a' swore we hurt him. We *had* to take him home. We *had* to keep him. An' he screeched so awful, an' was al'ays tryin' to run away. Pore little thing!" she said, mopping her eyes with her apron.

"But where was the other child?" asked the doctor.

"T' other child?"

"The one that you got from the poorhouse three years before Nancy Bane lost her child."

"Uh, he was dead; dead and buried the spring 'fore we got Brat out the creek. His grave is up thar back o' our cabin."

"A-ah, I see! Were you cruel to this child?" The doctor flung the question at Marthy.

"To Brat? That pitiful pore little thing!"

"He was one of the Farlans," he reminded her, watching her keenly.

"*He* wa'n't nothin' but God's pore little fool," she said in a trembling voice.

Dr. Wayne sat still a moment, tapping the chair-arm with a deliberate forefinger. "Well, of course I don't know what Griffin Sheringham will do—"

Bill raised his chin defiantly. "What c'n Griff Shearam do for my pullin' his brat out the creek an' keepin' him from drowndin'? Anyway, I don't reckon I 'll ever lay eyes on him ag'in. Me an' Marthy's goin' to West Virginia for good an' all."

Dr. Wayne considered a minute. Then he waved his hand toward the open door. "I wish West Virginia joy of you!" he said. He shook hands with Marthy, and left a silver coin in her palm. "You 'll be wanting tobacco on your tramp," he said. "Good night and good-by."

Mr. Sheringham came to Manson the next morning, in response to the doctor's message, and was overwhelmed with joy at the tidings that awaited him.

"My child! raised from the dead!" he gasped. "Where is he? Oh! I must see him. I must have him at once; at once!"

"Control yourself, my man," said Dr. Wayne. "You 'll frighten him; may do him harm."

"I am calm; I 'm perfectly calm," Mr. Sheringham insisted, with a quivering laugh that ended in a sob. "My own son! Oh, doctor! don't keep him from me."

"Remember, he knows you only as the stranger of yesterday. Steady now!"

"Yes, yes! oh, yes!" promised Mr. Sheringham. But when he saw his child, the son restored to him as from the dead, his emotion overpowered him and, laughing and crying, he rushed forward with outstretched arms, seized the little fellow and covered his face with kisses and tears.

The frightened child struggled to escape, calling, "Jimp! Jimp!"

The doctor interposed, but he could not quiet the little fellow until he carried him back to Jimps.

"Don't touch him again," he said authorita-

tively to Mr. Sheringham. "You must not agitate him. Remember the terrible shocks he has had. Be gentle and patient, and he 'll come round in time." Then he made a concession to the father's yearning look. "If you 'll be very quiet, you may sit here in the room. But don't try to force matters."

Mr. Sheringham sat in a corner of the sick-room, watching his child with pathetic, longing devotion. Jimps lay still, looking from father to son. At last he pulled Grief's head close to him.

"A daddy 's a mighty fine thing to have," he murmured in the child's ear. "They think a heap o' thar little boys. Ef that was my daddy lookin' at me so wishful-like, I 'd go an' set in his lap."

Grief gazed at his father.

"I 'd go to him," repeated Jimps.

Grief looked dubiously at his unknown father, and then back to his beloved cousin. "I don't mind settin' in his lap," he said at last, "but I want holt o' yore hand."

"Well, he c'n set by the bed, an' then you need n't leave go o' me," suggested Jimps.

So Mr. Sheringham came to the bedside, and the little hand was a bond between him and Jimps that put an end to the old bitterness and strife.

That afternoon Page and Harrison, on their way to the station, came to say farewell. They were allowed to tiptoe into Jimps's room, for a few words of greeting and good-by.

"How different Brat looks!—Grief, I mean," Page said to Dr. Wayne, when they went out. "I should n't know he was the same child I saw in the cabin."

"He is different; he 's himself now," answered the doctor. "It 's a wonderful case. You remember I asked, that first day, if he had had a blow on the head. The things you had observed—his headaches, his staggering gait, his apathy, and that cephalic cry—were symptoms of concussion of the brain. It was caused, no doubt, by his going head-foremost against a rock in Falling Water."

"And you said he might have to have an operation," Page remembered.

"Yes. Nature performed that operation," replied Dr. Wayne. "When he fell from

the cliff, he struck his head on a sharp rock and received a line fracture. In the half-hour or so that he lay there, the cerebral fluid drained out with the blood from the wound, and that relieved the brain pressure and restored his faculties. When he got up he recognized Jimps, and was even able to go for help, though he fainted after that exertion. Soon we 'll have him well and strong."

"And Jimps?"

"Oh! he 's responding nicely to treatment; he 's on the highroad to recovery," answered Dr. Wayne.

Harrison looked at his watch.

"We must go," said Page. "We 'll see you next summer, dear folks, all of you."

But only three weeks after this long farewell she and Harrison came back again.

"Father had to come here about Forest Service business," Page explained to the Waynes. "And he brought us with him, to stay between trains, and see you all."

"Not all whom you left here," said Mrs. Wayne. "Jimps has gone home."

"O-oh!" Page was keenly disappointed.

"He made a wonderfully rapid recovery," said Dr. Wayne. "And he was so anxious to get home that I let him go to-day."

"We offered to carry him," said Mrs. Wayne. "But he was set on walking. There were byways he wanted to take, for sake of wild-grape vines and crows' nests and secret springs and special apple-trees. So he went off, an hour ago, with Mr. Sheringham and little Griffin."

"Oh!" Page sighed dolorously. "We did want to see Jimps. I 'm *so* disappointed!"

"Jump in my buggy," said the doctor. "We 'll follow them up."

They overtook the wayfarers resting on a rock at the bend of the road. Little Griffin was sitting beside his father, giving three-year-old news about berry patches and squirrel nests. Jimps was lying flat on the ground, whistling softly and looking from under lowered lids at the wide, fair valley and the wooded hills and the far-off mountains. He sat up, with an exclamation of surprise, when Page jumped out of the buggy and ran toward him.

"Why, Jimps! how well you are looking!"

She exclaimed, gazing at him with joyful amazement. "I did n't know any one could get well so quickly."

"Uh! I 'm all right," he said, smiling and nodding greetings.

"You sure are all right, old scout," Harrison said with emphasis.

"So 's you." Jimps turned to him with a grin. "Say! What would you 'a' done ef Pooles had stood fast when you said 'Three'?"

"What do you know about that?" asked Harrison. He looked at Page, who smiled and glanced at Dr. Wayne. Harrison laughed. "Well—they did n't," he said. "And now everything 's all right, except that Bill Poole got off scot-free. He ought to be in jail," he said, with the uncompromising severity of youth.

"Uh! he an' Marthy 's out the way, gone for good," said Jimps comfortably. "An' thar house is burnt up. Nobody knows ef they did it a-purpose or ef it was happen-chance. Anyway, that old place is a ash-pile."

"Oh! I 'm so glad!" exclaimed Page. "The

world is so much nicer with that dark old prison hut out of it."

"I 'm glad, too," said Jimps. "It makes sure thar 's no come-back o' Pooles. We-all are goin' to live up Rocky Hollow now. It 's our home."

"Your home?" asked Page.

Jimps nodded his head. "Uncle Griff 's give the 'Den' to mammy, now he an' Grief 's goin' down the country to live. She would n't 'a' took it off him," he hastened to explain the favor his mother had conferred, by accepting her brother-in-law's gift. "But he did n't treat Aunt Nance amiss. He thought she was tired o' him; an' she was jest a-honin' for the mountains."

There was a little silence, then Jimps laughed aloud.

"A place to bide!" he said jubilantly. "Nobody can't say 'Git out!' or 'Move on!' to us, nuver no more! An' thar 's thrushers an' squirrels an' them elks an' all sorts o' things up that hollow. An' Grief 's comin' to see us."

"Jimps!" Mr. Sheringham said earnestly, repeating a request that he had been urging for

many days. "Jimps, I wish you would go home with me, to stay with little Griffin; be his big brother and go to school with him; do everything, have everything, like my own son."

Jimps smiled and shook his head. "I got to stay with the mountains," he said whimsically.

"But, my boy—" and Mr. Sheringham poured out arguments and entreaties.

Jimps shook his head again; shook it more emphatically when Harrison urged him to accept the generous offer.

"I can't go 'way from the mountains," he said.

"Of course you 'd miss them," said Harrison. "I missed them a lot at first, and I keep on missing them sometimes. But it 's great to go to school, with all the fun of games and getting ready to do things when I 'm a man; be an engineer or in the Forest Service."

"That 's all right for you. But me— Naw! naw!" Jimps declined positively.

"You 're wasting words," Dr. Wayne said placidly. "Jimps Farlan, here in the Virginia mountains, is a creature of the Golden Age. In these last few months he has come in-

to a widening circle of human sympathy, but he is still nearly as close akin to trees and birds and beasts as he is to us. Not even blessed Saint John of Patmos, I think, could tame him to-day when he 's going back, longing and eager, to his outdoors.''

Jimps answered Dr. Wayne's smile without understanding his words. ''Yes, I 'm goin' back,'' he said. ''I 'm obleeged to you-all. You 've been mighty good to me, an' I wish you well.''

He stood up and looked around.

Summer was gone. A new season, new things, were at hand. The green of the chestnut woods had taken on a golden tint. A great maple-tree at the edge of the woodland was flinging abroad the scarlet-and-gold banner of early autumn, and in the air was the sparkle of sunshine on the first frost.

''Ain't it pretty?'' said Jimps; ''with the blue from the sky drappin' down on the fur mountains an' fillin' the nigh hollows?'' He gazed, with a wistful light in his eyes, at 'Way-High Mountain jutting up against the horizon. ''An' the birds is singin' thar, an' things comin'

an' goin', goin' an' comin'. Um-m-m! What would they all do 'thout me?"

They stood together in a little silence.

"Well, well!" said Dr. Wayne. "We must be going, Miss Page, if you are to reach the station in time to catch that train."

There was a little chatter of good wishes and farewells.

As they started away, Page and Harrison waved their hands to Jimps. But he did not wave back; for at that moment there came from the thicket above him the clear, sweet, calling song of the wood-thrush. He sprang forward and answered it with notes that seemed to come less from the lips than from the very heart of joy. They had one glimpse of his uplifted radiant face; then the forest closed around him.

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